

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,
Washington, DC, October 20, 1998.
Acting Comptroller General JAMES
HINCHMAN,
General Accounting Office,
Washington, DC

DEAR MR. HINCHMAN: There is a growing concern that trucks are dangerous. Currently, commercial trucks represent just 3 percent of all registered vehicles in the United States, but they are involved in 13 percent of the total traffic fatalities. Over the past ten years, the fatal accident rates for all vehicles have been declining; however, commercial motor vehicle accidents, fatalities, and fatality rates are increasing.

I am writing to request that the General Accounting Office conduct an investigation on the effectiveness of the Federal Highway Administration's motor carrier safety program in reducing truck accident and truck safety violations in the United States. This review should focus on trends since 1990.

I would appreciate a briefing on this issue prior to our hearing on the Federal Highway Administration's 2000 federal appropriations, which is tentatively scheduled for late February or early March. A report should be issued by June, 1999.

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Stephanie Gupta of the Subcommittee staff on (202) 225-2141

Sincerely,

FRANK R. WOLF,
Chairman.

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA,
DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE,
Fairfax Station, VA, August 28, 1998.

Hon. FRANK R. WOLF,
Herndon, VA.

DEAR CONGRESSMAN WOLF: On August 26, 1998, members of the Coalition for Safe Roads met with you at your Herndon office to discuss legislation relative to trucks with triple trailers using our highways. I was invited to attend, and spoke to you about the number of motor carrier checks our troopers had conducted during 1997.

During the meeting you expressed interest in the statistical information the Virginia Department of State Police had concerning motor carrier checks and the drivers and trucks/buses placed out-of-service. I have outlined below statistical information for both the entire State of Virginia during the calendar year of 1997:

Inspection summary	Statewide	NOVA
Inspections conducted	42,256	13,915
Drivers in violation	19,861	5,250
Defective vehicles	25,221	7,721
Drivers taken out-of-service	3,627	1,034
Vehicles taken out-of-service	8,982	3,117
Out-of-service violations	18,692	6,262
All other violations	90,269	24,660

The all other violations row above includes all deficiencies found, and an arrest, summons or warning was given.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about the issue of highway safety specifically as it relates to trucks and tractor-trailers. Your support for highway safety is most important in providing America's citizens a safe means of travel. If my staff or I can be of assistance to you, we may be contacted at 703-323-4500.

Thanks again.

Sincerely,

DONALD P. GARRETT,
Captain,
Division Seven Commander.

[From the Washington Post, Sept. 19, 1998]

ROAD SAFETY—AND HILL PITFALLS

A House-Senate Transportation appropriations conference is wrestling to resolve dif-

ferences over two important highway safety issues that shouldn't even be in dispute: the identification of trucks carrying agricultural chemicals, and a proposal to consolidate federal highway safety responsibilities under a single agency best organized to do the job.

The battling over hazardous-materials warnings has to do with a federal requirement that, effective Oct. 1, trucks carrying agricultural chemicals such as fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides and insecticides must carry placards identifying the material on board and providing an emergency telephone number. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), chairman of the transportation appropriations subcommittee in the House, explains that the placards will provide emergency response teams with important information on the substances they are called upon to handle. For instance, a truck carrying topsoil should be handled quite differently from one transporting ammonium nitrate.

In the Senate bill, an exemption to the placard requirement has been granted for a number of states. Opponents claim the identification requirements burden farmers. It can't be much of a financial burden, through: Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, which supports the requirement, calculates the cost of 58 cents a placard. The lack of a placard advising rescue teams of what is on board could cost lives. Dozens of national and local firefighting units oppose any weakening of the provisions.

The second proposal involves more than a mere shift of boxes on federal agency flow charts. It would relocate the Transportation Department's Office of Motor Carriers—which oversees trucking laws—from the Federal Highway Administration to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which focuses on safety. The point: The office of motor carriers is responsible for truck safety requirements such as the length and weight of the vehicle and the time that a trucker may drive; the logical home for this office is in the agency that deals with other vehicle safety issues.

ON EDUCATION AND DRUGS

HON. GERALD B.H. SOLOMON

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 20, 1998

Mr. SOLOMON. Mr. Speaker, there is something missing from the recent education debate . . . and what is missing is President Clinton's record on illegal drugs and its effect on the America's education system.

The media seem to buy the Democrat's claim that they care more about education than do Republicans. What seems to be missing from this debate—or what the media seems willing ignore is the fact that illegal drug use by school age children has doubled since President Clinton took office. Studies show that illegal drug use—including marijuana—robs students of their motivation and self-esteem, leaving them unable to concentrate and indifferent to learning.

There is not a parent in America who sends their children off to school without worrying that they will become exposed to illegal drugs. And it's not just teenagers anymore.

Parents are now concerned about their 6th, 7th and 8th grade children getting involved with illegal drugs. Since 1992, marijuana use has jumped 150% among 12 and 13 year old students and 300% among high school students.

For the first time, more than half of all middle-school students report that illegal drugs are used, kept and sold at their schools.

During the Reagan/Bush years drug use dropped, from 24 million individuals using drugs in 1979 to 11 million in 1992. These hard fought gains were wasted by President Clinton.

The number one reason young people drop out of school is because of their involvement with illegal drugs. In a study conducted among a sample of 9th to 11th graders, more than half of the heavy drug users dropped out—twice the rate of those who are drug free.

Studies also show that students involved with drugs are four times more likely to receive poor grades than are drug free students. The rise in illegal drug use also correlates closely with rising school violence.

Today in America, one third of high school students smoke pot. The message we need to send America's parents and grandparents in the education debate is that President Clinton has earned a failing grade in keeping illegal drugs out of the hands of their school aged children and grandchildren.

You cannot claim to be an education President while ignoring rising illegal drug use in America's schools.

LATIN AMERICA: CHALLENGES TO STABILITY

HON. ELTON GALLEGLY

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 20, 1998

Mr. GALLEGLY. Mr. Speaker, as 1998 draws to a close, four countries in the Western Hemisphere bear close observation. Events taking shape in those nations could have a substantial impact on the region's stability, the pace of democratization and the success of economic reform. These nations worth watching include: Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Paraguay.

BRAZIL

As the contagion of the "Asian/Russian" financial crisis spreads into Latin America, the next three months could be critical to the economic and political stability of the hemisphere. All eyes are currently focused on Brazil and its attempts to stave off the effects of the Asian flu. A major financial downturn in Brazil, the region's third largest economy and the world's ninth largest could spell economic trouble throughout the entire region, including within the United States.

Brazil is by far the most important economy in South America. With a population of 157 million, Brazil's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) stood at approximately \$806 billion in 1997. Brazil accounts for some 45 percent of all Latin America's GDP. U.S. banks have some \$34 billion in outstanding loans to Brazil and over \$100 billion in Latin America. U.S. private investment in Brazil stands at \$25 billion and trade between the U.S. and Brazil ranges around \$16 billion. Since August, however, Brazil's stock market has plunged 40 percent and its cash reserves have plummeted \$30 billion. This, in turn, has forced interest rates up to 50 percent and has resulted in a budget deficit of 7 percent of GNP, twice what it was when Cardoso first took office. Deficit spending has led international and domestic short term investors to pull out of Brazil

in record numbers. Finally, the nation's currency, the "Real", is considered overvalued but stable.

In the midst of all this turmoil, Brazil held elections on October 3rd for president and parliament. These elections marked a very significant transition for Brazil in that President Cardoso became the first civilian president since military rule both to take over from a civilian predecessor as well as to succeed himself in office. He won this election with roughly the same percentage of the vote as he did four years ago.

President Cardoso, a former university professor, is the inflation-taming engineer of the country's economic turnaround which has been faltering of late. The current economic crisis is due to effects from the Asian crisis, as well as from a still bloated state sector and a very generous pension system. The voters, however, chose not to blame him for the crisis, but rather the global economic circumstances. Mr. Cardoso has remained for the most part on message regarding Brazil's commitment to free market reforms and the IMF's and other lenders' demands for continued austerity and reform. His new economic plan calls for spending cuts of over \$20 billion, some tax increases and a reform of the nation's pension system. The IMF has readied a \$30 billion package of international credit.

Unfortunately, Cardoso's tenacity may not be matched by the same attitude in his legislature; the President still must negotiate with a parliament that has many reasons to oppose further reforms and austerity. Nevertheless, his job may have been made slightly easier with the recent elections for parliament. While his five-party coalition actually lost a few seats overall, the President's hand was strengthened in that his own party increased its representation within the coalition, and the more moderate leftists increased their representation among the opposition. In short, Mr. Cardoso should have greater control over his coalition, and the left might be more willing to cooperate. The wild cards are the fact that almost half of the new parliament, to be seated in February, will be freshman whose loyalties are not known, the role the powerful governors will play in securing local support for reform, and the fact that the most important measures, pension and civil service reform, require constitutional reform and thus three-fifths votes. To that end, the President is considering a proposal to hold a constituent assembly next year to permit changes to the constitution by a simple majority vote in the Parliament.

Brazil's economic fate will spell either relief or trouble for the rest of Latin America. If the Brazilian government can keep the economy from sliding further and can initiate major economic reforms, then as the situation stabilizes, international investors will return to Brazil, thus avoiding the dramatic consequences experienced by Asia and Russia.

COLOMBIA

On June 21, the Colombian people voted in record numbers and elected Andres Pastrana as their new President. The large turnout of voters was seen as an expression of support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict which has engulfed all of Colombia for the past four decades.

President Pastrana has taken over a country in which a guerrilla force of 20,000 armed soldiers has fought the government to a military standstill with neither side capable of se-

curing a final battlefield victory. The guerrillas, who are financing their war effort largely from the narcotics trade, have grown stronger and inflicted serious defeats on the military in 1998. The Colombian army has been demoralized through its battlefield losses and is still regarded as ill equipped and ill-trained to continue to wage a prolonged war. U.S. assistance to the military, desperately needed, is restricted under a U.S. congressional mandate that allows aid to go only to units cleared of human rights violations. In addition to the guerrilla war in certain parts of the country the government has ceased to function and law and order has long since disappeared. The rise of paramilitary armies, which have waged an indiscriminate war against the civilian population in the name of fighting the guerrillas, and who also draw financial support from an involvement in the drug trade, have injected a new level of violence which can not seem to be controlled by the government.

Even before taking office, President-elect Pastrana, attempted to fulfill this principle campaign pledge of bringing an end to the 38 years of internal guerrilla war by meeting secretly with the leader of the largest guerrilla group, the FARC where they discussed the possibilities for peace. Upon taking office on August 7, 1998, President Pastrana announced that peace talks with the guerrillas would begin in November and that, as a prelude to those talks, he was embarking on a bold plan to turn a large swath of central Colombia into a temporary "demilitarized zone" in which peace talks with the two main guerrilla groups could commence.

To that end, on October 15, President Pastrana announced that some 4,000 Colombian soldiers would begin withdrawing from the "zones" which would be totally demilitarized by November 7. The demilitarization of these "zones" would last until February, depending upon the success of the talks. This plan has been both hailed as a bold gamble, which could lead to a substantial amount of good-will among the guerrilla leadership, as well as criticized as a guerrilla trick which would only serve to allow the guerrillas to use the "zones" and the time to rearm and retrain their forces for a major military push next year. And, while fighting within the "zones" will apparently cease, there is no general nationwide cease-fire which is expected to result in the guerrilla and Colombian military units continuing to battle in other parts of the nation even as this long peace process continues forward.

Internal reaction to President Pastrana's plan has been one of cautious optimism among the populace. Except for inside the "zones", which had been subject to considerable guerrilla influence anyway and where the population is nervous about living under de facto guerrilla control, the move is seen as a necessary gambit to test the intentions of the guerrillas to seek peace. Even the military, which has expressed its doubts, now realizes that it, too, can use the time to concentrate forces in other parts of the country or to rearm and retain their forces in the event these talks break down and fighting escalates.

U.S. reaction to the plan has been mixed. President Pastrana must be given the benefit of the doubt and supported in his attempts to carry out his mandate of peace in the manner he believes is best. However, concern has been expressed over his plan's impact on the counter narcotics program within the country.

The Pastrana government insists that very little antinarcotics activity has been carried out by the police in the "zones." However, there has been a substantial amount of drug activity reported in those areas. Some in the United States have warned the Colombians not to allow the "zones" or the peace talks to interfere with the anti-drug campaign.

The peace talks are set to begin in early November. The U.S., and all of Latin America, will be watching the progress of these discussions very closely as well as the activities of the guerrilla forces outside the "zones."

VENEZUELA

Venezuela, suffering a severe economic crisis due to a crippling drop in world oil prices, faces perhaps its most severe political test since the attempted military coup of 1992, when it will hold legislative elections in Early November and a presidential election early in December. These elections represent a turning point for Venezuela, but this turning point contrasts sharply with that of Brazil. For the United States, the outcome could cause significant trouble since over 50 percent of our oil imports come from Venezuela.

Ironically, the 1992 coup leader, retired Lt. Col. Hugo Chavez, who was pardoned by current President, Caldera after spending two years in prison, is posed to win the December 6th Presidential elections. It is reported that he may have some ties to leftist guerrillas in Colombia as well as in his own country; and he has at various times vowed to "deep fry the heads" of his opponents. Even more problematic, he has, on occasion, vowed to cut off most of the nation's financial and trading relationships with other countries, including its lucrative oil industry contracts. Recently, as the election nears and his lead has slipped a bit and the United States grows more nervous, he has tried to soften his rhetoric by promising to maintain Venezuela's thriving, partially privatized oil industry. But critics are not impressed, especially when they consider his group of advisers: a group of extremists of both the left and the right.

Also worrisome is the fact that the military is divided over his candidacy. Many of the junior officers down to the rank and file see him as much of the country's poor see him: as a new generation politician. But the higher ranking officers regard him as the middle and upper classes of society see him: as a self-infatuated egoist bent on nationalizing what is left of Venezuela's economy and upsetting the country's tenuous social cohesion, regardless of whether or not he really wants to help the poor and root out the notorious corruption of Venezuelan politics.

The traditional parties, viewed from within a large part of Venezuelan society as extremely corrupt and discredited, are given little chance of defeating Chavez. The chances of the many other independent candidates for president (including a former beauty queen) of winning are almost non-existent. So far, the two major political parties, the AD and COPEI, as well as some of the smaller parties, have focused on the legislative and gubernatorial elections as a way to secure a power base.

This year the government separated the legislative and local elections from the presidential election so that they might, by virtue of a lower turnout and their very panicked and thus motivated base, hold onto power in the national legislature and at the regional and local level. It is too early to tell whether they

will achieve this, but if they do it could well set the country up for a showdown between a victorious Chavez and all the rest of the country's governmental system.

U.S. observers see only one possible option: that after the November elections, all independent candidates for president will coalesce around one candidate, perhaps, the pro-business and pro-reform successful former governor, Henrique Salas Romer. He is currently second in the polls, but still not within striking distance. Moreover, this scenario is not without danger: if the lower classes perceive that the middle and upper classes are cooperating to defeat their candidate that may energize even more dedicated voters for Chavez and increase their resolve to turn out on election day. Worse, if Chavez loses after leading in the polls for so long and by so much, he has already said he will blame fraud and order his "troops" into the streets. Chavez has already accused the head of the army of plotting to deny the election to Chavez which in Chavez's words could "provoke civil war." This could set off a period of violent instability throughout the country.

PARAGUAY

On May 10, Paraguay held only its second democratic election for President since the end of the 35-year dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner. The election of Raul Cubas Grau represented the first civilian leader to succeed another as Paraguay's President. But the Administration of President Cubas, barely three months old, faces a potential constitutional crisis which threatens the struggling democracy. This crisis has been precipitated by the role of the real beneficiary of Paraguay's recent elections—former General Lino Oviedo.

In April 1996, after a brewing internal feud between then-President Juan Carlos Wasmosy and General Lino Oviedo, head of the Paraguayan armed forces, Oviedo was fired. Not willing to go quietly, General Oviedo retired to his barracks and staged what was described as a modest coup attempt against President Wasmosy, calling for the President to step down. However, the situation was considered serious enough that representatives of Paraguay's neighboring countries and the Secretary General of the OAS felt it necessary to intervene to convince General Oviedo to end his rebellion. As a result of the intervention, a compromise was reached in which General Oviedo would end his coup and retire, and would then be given the portfolio of Minister of Defense. Oviedo agreed and the rebellion ended. However, in the ensuing period, public opposition arose against the deal, and the General, leading President Wasmosy to void the agreement. General Oviedo left the capital vowing to run for President.

In 1997, in preparation for the upcoming elections, a split developed within the ruling Colorado political party, which had governed Paraguay for more than 50 years. The debate pitted sitting President Juan Carlos Wasmosy and his choice of a successor, Luis Argana, against the resurgent former General, Oviedo, who had formed his own party within the Colorado organization. In September of 1997, in a surprise which shocked everyone observing Paraguay, General Oviedo won the Colorado party nomination for President. He nominated Raul Cubas as his candidate for Vice-President and embarked on an ambitious and skillful campaign.

In December of 1997, President Wasmosy, not wishing to turn control of the government over to his arch enemy, General Oviedo, had Oviedo arrested on charges of sedition related to the 1996 attempted coup. In February, 1998, a Wasmosy-appointed military tribunal convicted Oviedo and sentenced him to ten years in prison. In mid-April the Supreme Court upheld the tribunal's sentence which automatically nullified Oviedo's candidacy and threw the Presidential campaign into disarray. The Colorado party then elevated Raul Cubas to be the Presidential candidate and appointed Luis Argana as Vice Presidential candidate. On May 10, Raul Cubas was elected President of Paraguay, but the vote was seen more as a vote for Oviedo than for Cubas.

After his election, Cubas indicated that one of the first things he would do would be to free ex-general Oviedo from jail. In reaction, the parliament passed a law limiting presidential pardons by stating that a prisoner had to serve at least half of his sentence before being granted a pardon.

Shortly after taking office on August 15, and despite the new law, President Cubas announced that he was commuting Oviedo's ten-year prison sentence and would release him from jail. This action has set off a chain reaction of events which has threatened the very foundation of Paraguay's politics and its democracy. Immediately after his decision to commute the sentence, a group of opposition lawmakers in the Parliament petitioned the Supreme Court to overrule the pardon and to order Oviedo back to prison. In addition, several lawmakers began searching for a way to have President Cubas impeached. And, several members of Cubas' cabinet, including the President's brother, the Commerce Minister, resigned in protest.

The Supreme Court is currently trying to decide whether to hear the petition to overrule the Presidential pardon. However, it is reported that Oviedo has threatened reprisals against anyone trying to uphold the Parliament's petition and is preparing to defend himself against any attempts to do so. It is unclear whether President Cubas would uphold the laws of the state and would permit the re-arrest of Oviedo should the Supreme Court rule that way. It is also reported that President Cubas may be threatening the four Supreme Court Justices who have not yet attained what would be considered lifetime tenure on the Court with those appointments.

This crisis between the executive, the legislature and the court has shaken the foundation of Paraguay's government and could set the stage for a possible military action if the issue is not resolved peacefully. It is incumbent upon the actors in this crisis to resolve their differences so that democracy is preserved, that the separation of powers among the three branches of government is upheld and that the rule of law prevails.

A TRIBUTE TO JANET BROWN

HON. GERALD D. KLECZKA

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 20, 1998

Mr. KLECZKA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in tribute to my Administrative Assistant, Janet Brown. In a few short weeks Janet will be

leaving my office for the greener, or perhaps whiter, pastures of Minnesota. Janet and her fiancé, Don Kitson, are planning a wedding next year and will soon start the construction of their own airplane. I am certain that Don and Janet have a wonderful future ahead of them—if she can survive five years of working for me, she can survive at least fifty-five years of marriage with Don.

We all recognize the importance of congressional staff. Unfortunately, far too many of them come and go on short notice. Fortunately for my office and the constituents of the Fourth Congressional District of Wisconsin, Janet has not simply come and gone. Instead, she has sacrificed herself for all of us, be it through long hours at the office, helpful advice to a colleague, or timely service for a constituent.

Janet has been a model of perseverance and dedication. In 1993, Janet came to work for me as a Staff Assistant and she leaves as my Administrative Assistant. In those five years, Janet has held nearly every position in my office. I am sure there were many times Janet went home, frustrated after a long day at the office, determined to move on to another job. To her credit, Janet always returned the next day with a smile on her face, eager to work.

Janet is also a breast cancer survivor. Instead of succumbing to this awful disease, Janet conquered it. She never doubted her ability to persevere, and she is stronger person for it. More important, Janet now lends her time to help other women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer.

Because so many of our staff come and go, we get into a habit of thinking that staff are interchangeable parts—if someone leaves, another will step in and take their place. Some staffers do not stay in one place long enough to make an impression, others are harder to replace because of their special qualities. And there are a select few like Janet Brown who are never truly replaced.

Because Janet has held nearly every position in my office and has faced such difficult challenges, the other members of my staff constantly turn to her in times of need. Persons new to the office look to her for advice, and veterans appreciate her unique ability to be both a colleague and friend. When Janet departs my staff in a few weeks, she will be leaving behind an office that is stronger because of her years of service.

Janet has also become a close friend of my family. Just as the other staff members rely on her for help, so do we. Our dog and office mascot Colby will miss the hours of undivided attention he received from Janet. My wife and I truly appreciate all the times Janet has helped us through the last-minute emergencies and scheduling changes that are inherent to a career in Congress. Because of those times Janet will always have a special place in my heart and on my auto insurance record.

Mr. Speaker, I and the entire staff are saying goodbye not only to a truly great professional, but a truly great friend as well. Janet, we wish you the best of luck and our deepest and most heartfelt thanks.