

# comments & letters

## No more excuses or delays

What is it that this Congress and the Department of Homeland Security simply don't get? Or do they get it and don't want to talk about it? The greatest threat to our nation, the greatest impact on all of us without exception would be the closing of U.S. seaports and land ports of entry. Ports are the arteries of commerce. There is no replacement for them. They are a *sine qua non* condition of our survival.

As reported by the Government Accountability Office, the Brookings Institution estimated costs associated with a seaport closure resulting from the detonation of a weapon of mass destruction to be \$1 trillion dollars. Consultant Booz, Allen and Hamilton found that just discovering an undetonated weapon of mass destruction would likely keep other seaports closed, with a cost of \$58 billion. The School of Public Affairs at the University of California Los Angeles reported that the five-day impact of a labor dispute, alone, resulted in a cost to the economy of \$4.7 billion. As recently as March the Congressional Budget Office cited impact studies revealing that a 10-day shutdown of West Coast ports would cost the economy \$1.9 billion per day. Simulation studies of a three-year shutdown — clearly possible with a dirty bomb — reduced “... real GDP by between 0.35 percent and 0.55

percent, or \$45 billion to \$70 billion, per year.”

These are the spectacular consequences of seaport closures. In the most benign but actual scenario, look what happened Aug. 17, when bomb-sniffing dogs smelled explosives in a container at the Port of Seattle where there were only oily rags: an evacuation of one-half mile. Who knows what that cost?

The day after the Seattle event the Rand Corp. released a report containing “what if” findings that stated “... a nuclear explosion at the Port of Long Beach, Calif., could kill 60,000 people instantly, expose 150,000 more to hazardous radiation, and cause 10 times more economic loss than the 9/11 terrorist attacks.” Detection, therefore, must be done prior to entering a U.S. seaport or land port of entry.

Many of us in and out of the container security business will readily admit that it's too late to check for nuclear explosives after the container arrives at a U.S. port. However, science demonstrates that the current portal X-ray machines used at foreign ports in support of the Container Security Initiative (CSI), although exceptionally good at detecting radiation from bananas, cannot detect highly enriched uranium that's shielded. In August, this was confirmed by the U.S. Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO) that plans to award contracts for the purpose of developing portal radiation detection systems to detect shielded enriched uranium at foreign and U.S. ports. DNDO projects a two-year development program



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and then an unknown time frame for commercialization.

It appears that either DHS doesn't know much about the science or technology already available that uses "in-container" monitoring that can now detect shielded highly enriched uranium, or it doesn't have the will to push for its adoption and use. The result is more unnecessary delay in securing our ports. Security experts and scientists generally agree that the better solution would be to use in-container monitors that are reliable and inexpensive. These monitors can easily detect and transmit the presence of shielded highly enriched uranium given the time involved in a global supply chain and the proximity of the detector to the source of the radiation. It looks like it's more important simply to spend than implement a solution that already exists.

Land ports of entry are not often considered in calculating the impact on our economy, but have similar cargo flows, as do seaports. If one of our major land ports like Laredo, Texas, or Detroit were closed, what would be the impact? Commercial traffic volumes can be best demonstrated by a simple visual. In 1999 at Texas A&M International University a projection was made by using truck-crossing data. The projection involved lining up the annual truck crossings at Laredo into a simple bumper-to-bumper calculation using a 53-foot trailer and length of a standard tractor. The line went from Laredo, Texas to Canada 11.5 times. Each one of those crossings, and there were millions, could have been a terrorist's means of closing that port and others along the border.

Additionally, since it is well known that we have little cooperation from Mexico on container security and border crossing security (note that Mexico does not have one CSI operational port, nor has it signed the U.S. Container Security Declaration of Principles as other countries have done), the capacity of a terrorist cell to take out the bridges over the Rio Grande is without debate.

Furthermore, the intelligence-gathering maturation of DHS, and my experience along the border with Customs and Border Protection and the Border Patrol in this regard, do not produce comforting feelings. I believe it unlikely that DHS can protect our seaports and land ports of entry because of its lack of clear,

decisive steps in the container security field. Again its focus seems to be reactive instead of proactive. It is now focused on taking away liquids from airline passengers. But, even that was the result of the U.K.'s work, not DHS.

Perhaps the only positive in the field of container security is the pending port security Senate Bill 2459, a compromise bill. In it, although the language is not final, there is recognition of the container security threat, and the offering of potential answers to it. The bill seems to be consistent with World Customs Organization standards to which the United States is a signatory. It also seems consistent with the U.S.'s own Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) program.

Delaying the passage of that bill, for me, is unthinkable. There's no time for politics on this issue. It's been five years since Sept. 11, 2001. Chasing illegals and taking away lipstick are no substitutes for the lack of leadership in forming a container security policy that is mature, robust, and above all doable! In October 2002, the Hart-Rudman Commission stated: "America is still unprepared ... 19 men with box cutters forced the U.S. to do itself what no other adversary could ever accomplish — a successful blockade of the U.S. economy.

When weighing the options and practices of Congress and DHS I can't help but return to the same question: What don't they get?

#### **Jim Giermanski**

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### **Football raises profile of motor carrier**

I'm not a Baltimore Ravens football fan, but I might start pulling for the purple and black. You see, their star running back, Jamal Lewis, carries the load on and off the field.

In a typical NFL game he may rush 25 or 30 times to deliver the ball to the end zone and score points for his team.

When he's off the field, Lewis is in charge of making sure 80,000-ton trucks have a game plan to deliver important loads to shippers. You see, Lewis is chief executive officer of Dalton, Ga.-based All American Xpress.

He bought motor carrier Smith Transportation in early 2005 as an investment and then changed the name.

The media in the Baltimore-Washington area had a field day when he showed up at training camp with a \$200,000 customized Ford pickup truck with twin 75-gallon side-mounted chrome gas tanks and a plush interior with seating for nine that includes a flat-screen TV on the back wall.

Lewis says he uses the vehicle to recruit truck drivers. He'll pull up at truck stops during the off-season and invite drivers to chat about job possibilities inside the plush vehicle.

All American's fleet comprises about 70 tractors, 130 refrigerated trailers and 10 dry trailers. At least half the company's business involves hauling perishable products. Lewis told the *Baltimore Sun* that his company has 115 tractors and 160 trailers, but who's going to point out to the chiseled, 245-pound Lewis that his numbers may be a bit embellished? Besides, the Federal Motor Carrier Administration's online database for motor carrier safety lists All American as having 20 trucks.

Lewis says the company is adding a couple of trucks per month and hopes to provide nationwide coverage with 1,000 trucks. I'm not buying that Lewis is a hands-on owner, managing the



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strategic plan and operations. But at least he's bringing some instant credibility and recognition to the trucking industry.

The Ravens player says he can make better money in trucking than in restaurants or other businesses. Margins can be tight, but he picked a good time to get in the industry because freight rates continue to rise to meet demand. He sounds like a smart businessman. Smarter, one hopes, than the guy who did four months time last year to settle a charge of helping a friend consummate a drug deal while in college.

If trucking companies like YRC Worldwide and UPS can get into sports by sponsoring NASCAR teams, why can't a sports star sponsor a trucking company?

Besides, as a Washington-area resident who can't stand the Redskins, the Ravens look like a better local alternative. *(Eric Kulisch)*

## Mass road kill

A couple of recent highway accidents illustrate the fact that live animal transport carries risks beyond general cargo and requires transport providers with special capabilities and knowledge.

A box truck ran off the highway in east Texas and pitched two dozen penguins on the pavement that were being temporarily transferred from the Indianapolis Zoo to Moody Gardens, a tourist destination in Galveston.

Three penguins were killed, including two that were struck by passing vehicles, said Texas Highway Patrol Trooper Richard Buchanan. Many suffered cuts and bruises. Some exotic fish were also killed. An octopus was uninjured.

The Indianapolis Zoo sent the animals to the Texas resort because it is remodeling its ocean exhibit. The driver of the truck, which was rented from Penske Leasing, is a zoo employee.

Buchanan told Reuters he was glad the accident was not worse.

"There was another truck full of snakes and alligators that was an hour ahead of them, so luckily we didn't have to deal with the alligators," he said.

The driver, Kelly Hodge, was cited for failure to drive in a single lane and for not having a logbook, which is required of commercial truck drivers to record how many hours they spend behind the wheel in accordance with federal safety limits. Texas public safety officials said she claimed to have lost control while reaching for a map and overcorrected.

She was also given a warning for not having a Class B commercial driver's license. Class B licenses apply to trucks greater than 26,001 pounds.

Hodge could have driven the same truck without a special license if she had just been hauling her furniture. But the Texas Highway Patrol determined that since the Indianapolis Zoo and Moody Gardens are in the business of showing animals the trip was for commercial purposes.

The PETA folks just couldn't resist the impulse to show their importance, calling on the zoo's president to investigate the matter and set up guidelines for safe transport of animals to prevent future accidents.

"If the zoo was trying to cut costs, penguins and other animals paid with the lives," said Debbie Leahy, director of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, in a statement. "Animals are at the mercy of zoo officials, so those officials need to safeguard them, including by only using properly

trained, and properly licensed professional drivers."

PETA speculated that Hodge could have fallen asleep at the wheel by driving too long without rest.

August was a bad month for animal lovers. About 60 puppies died when a truck trailer caught on fire near Lowell, Mass. The puppies were being distributed to pet stores by Hunte Corp., a large puppy broker in Goodman, Mo. The company operates its own private fleet, Hunte Delivery System Inc., which comprises 12 trucks.

The young dogs probably died of smoke inhalation before the fire was noticed, the local fire chief said.

A preliminary investigation indicated that a malfunctioning ventilation fan in the trailer, which was air-conditioned, might have started the fire.

Hunte President Steve Rook said his company has a near perfect safety record, and that drivers are required to stop every 90 minutes to check on the puppies' condition, according to the *Lowell Sun*.

Police ticketed the company for inoperative and defective brakes and failure to have an annual federal inspection. The driver, Joseph Price, was cited for not conducting a pre-trip inspection of the vehicle. Officials said the violations did not contribute to the fire. *(Eric Kulisch)*

## Now that's using your head

When it comes to sopping up oil on the high seas, the Philippines knows how to use its head.

In mid-August, the tanker *Solar 1* loaded with 1.8 million liters of oil sank off the coast of the Philippine island Guimaras. After two weeks, the oil began rising to the surface and caused extensive damage to more than 200 kilometers of coastline, which contain some of the countries most important mangrove and seaweed plantations, according to press reports from there region.

The under-funded Philippine Coast Guard took drastic action by rallying the country to provide clippings of human hair, which it would mix with chicken feathers in sacks, to help absorb the oil slick. According to a CNN report, "oil clings to hair as the tiny scales on hair snag and hold the oil. Chicken feathers, wool, and straw may also be used, but human hair is found to be more absorptive."

Hair was donated from numerous Philippine salons and barber shops. Even 15,000 inmates in a maximum security prison in southern Manila, including 1,000 prisoners on death row, joined the effort, *China's People's Daily* reported.

Even with all that hair, the oil spill is expected to inflict severe damage to the environment. *(Chris Gillis)*

## Bush overload

If you want to contact Tom Bush at the Department of Homeland Security, don't go through the main switchboard or you'll really get confused. Which Bush do you want?

There's the Tom Bush who works at Immigration and Customs Enforcement. A Tom Bush also works at the Transportation Security Administration. Another Tom Bush is at the Federal Emergency Management Agency. And then there is Tom Bush, deputy director of the Office of Anti-Terrorism at Customs and Border Protection.

Hopefully it's easier to get through to Bush at the White House. *(Eric Kulisch)*