



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

DOT Rest Stop Closures Threaten Public Safety

JAMES L. SEWARD November 17, 2010

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WORCESTER, 11/17/10 – Gathered at a rest area marked for closure, state Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I-Oneonta), Assemblyman Marc Butler (R/C/I-Newport) and Assemblyman Pete Lopez (R/C/I-Schoharie) announced today their opposition to a recent NYSDOT decision to shut down six highway rest areas.

“Weakening one of the few protective measures available to drivers on our roadways leaves all motorists, and in particular, truck drivers at risk,” said Senator Seward. **“While I understand the need to cut back in these tough fiscal times, I believe there are other areas that should be considered**

first.”

The New York State Department of Transportation recently announced the closure of six rest areas on interstate highways. Two of the rest areas were closed on November 1, with four others scheduled to be closed as of December 1.

“While we all recognize the need to cut back on the costs of government, it seems, in many cases, we are nibbling around the edges and not making the kind of decisions that really need to be made,” said Assemblyman Butler. “When you weigh the savings of this closure against the potential risk for our drivers, the value becomes very questionable.”

“We have a collective obligation to protect the health and safety of those who travel on our roads,” said Assemblyman Lopez. “If cost is the argument, we should step back and take a thoughtful, reasoned approach that explores all opportunities to make these rest-areas work more cost effectively. Whether it’s energy efficient technologies, the harnessing of inmate populations for maintenance or some other combination, we should be working together to find a solution that works in everyone’s best interest.”

Seward has written both Governor Paterson and DOT acting Commissioner Stanley Gee, calling on them to rethink the rest stop closure plan and develop alternate cost-saving strategies that do not have such a severe impact on public safety.

Also in attendance was Hope Rivenburg, whose husband, Jason Rivenburg, a truck driver from Schoharie County, was murdered at an abandoned gas station in South Carolina while resting in his rig. At the time of his death, Jason was a mere twelve miles from his destination but was unable to make his delivery because he was too early.

“It is extremely important to keep safe rest areas open,” said Hope Rivenburg. “The state needs to do its part to protect truck drivers so other families do not have to experience the

horrible loss that I have.”

Rivenburg is also advocating for federal passage of “Jason’s Law” which would implement a pilot program to expand and publicize safe, long-term parking facilities for commercial vehicles. Senator Seward and Assemblyman Lopez have urged passage of “Jason’s Law” and introduced legislation at the state level that would provide a mechanism for utilizing the federal funding should it be approved.

“In order to deliver the everyday essentials we all need to live, it is imperative that commercial drivers have rest areas available in order to get their mandated time off and sleep so that they may operate in the most safe, efficient and compliant manner possible,” said Kendra Adams, executive director New York State Motor Truck Association. “At a time when increased focus and attention has been placed on the dangers of drowsy driving, it is irresponsible for New York to make the decision to close rest areas. We understand the fiscal condition of the state and the need to find savings, but it should not be done in a manner which jeopardizes safety.”

“Commercial truck drivers already comply with stringent federal ‘hours of service’ regulations, they need a safe haven when they are forced by law to take a break. Closing rest areas is just another road block for these hard working men and women threatening both their livelihood and their lives,” Seward concluded.