



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

Welcome to Democracy

It's a great system – if you're in the right place at the right time

So I'm sitting in front of my computer one Tuesday morning in early June and up pops a notice that Ontario's Standing Committee on Justice Policy had scheduled "public hearings" on Bill 41 – the speed limiter legislation.

I had, of course, registered to appear before the committee to present OBAC's comments in opposition to the proposed legislation, indicating at the time I was aware of many stakeholders who had a strong desire to contribute to this important debate.

Considering the amount of misunderstanding among lawmakers about the speed limiter issue and about trucking in general – revealed in spades if one followed Bill 41 debate by politicians in the Legislative Assembly – it was clear that the only hope of enlightening some of these folks, in particular on technical and operational issues, was to get them talking to some real, working truck drivers.

I urged the committee to ensure that hearings be held where and when truckers would be able to participate, reminding them that truck drivers live all over the country, and because their jobs often keep them out on the road for days at a time, lots of lead time was essential.

You can imagine I was displeased – furious in fact – when I discovered that public debate would be limited to a one day, mid-week session in downtown Toronto – two days hence – making full and equal participation by most truck drivers virtually impossible.

To add insult to injury, those who could rearrange their schedules (as if) to appear, had only until noon that same day to indicate their intent.

How many truck drivers do you think were sitting in front of their laptops at nine that morning, ready to fire off an e-mail within a

couple of hours to say "count me in?"

Welcome to democracy – open to everyone in the same way as the Ritz Hotel.

Too little time

Like most not-for-profit associations, OBAC operates on a shoestring budget, in fact, as many of you know, I'm OBAC's sole staff person.

The Board of Directors and all our policy and technical advisors are volunteers; most of them are professional drivers who would be on the road delivering someone's bottled water or toilet paper or tomatoes at the time the meeting was to take place.

So I spent the two-day lead time organizing my schedule and shuffling priorities so we could take part in the democratic process – which left me working through the night before the meeting to finalize OBAC's presentation.

After pulling an all-nighter, I grabbed a quick shower, jumped into the car, and headed out on the six-hour drive from my house to downtown TO.

I was a couple of hours into the trip before it struck me what a dumb thing I was doing – I was simply too tired to be driving – and I was putting myself and every other driver on the road at risk.

So I pulled over and called the committee clerk to say I simply could not be there.

I asked for the opportunity to address the committee via teleconference to explain why I was a no-show, then I got myself to a safe place – the 10 Acre Truck Stop in Belleville as it turned out – and waited for the call.

By the time it came I was exhausted and frustrated and in no condition to make a coherent presentation, so after assuring committee members my written comments would be in their hands as soon as I was able to get safely to my

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e-mail, I let 'em have it, although I must admit, the fire was just about out of the old girl by then.

Democratic debacle

Although my faith in the democratic process was pushed to the wall by a government that seems bent on shutting people out rather than including them, I'm hoping the committee members have enough sense to dig a bit deeper into this issue and try to sort out fact from fiction.

The first fact I'd like them to get into their heads – and use to give some context to the debate – is how misguided it is to believe that trucks without electronic speed limiters will be barreling down the road too fast for conditions.

That's all I'm going to say about my position on government-mandated speed limiters – apparently I stated my opinion so clearly last time around that it ruffled a few feathers.

By the way, thanks so much to everyone who gave me the thumbs-up for tellin' it like it is; it's gratifying to be reassured that I'm pretty much on the money in the minds of a significant portion of the industry.

So, Bill 41?

I wasn't alone in my condemnation of the process that allowed such a short period for input, and as a result, the comment period was extended for a week.

Hardly what one would call an opportunity for full debate, but a nod, at least, in the direction of democracy?