US Senator Wants Tighter Trucking Regulations

The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In the wake of an accident on the New Jersey Turnpike that injured actor and comedian Tracy Morgan, U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer on Sunday launched a plan to keep tired truck drivers off the road.

The New York Democrat has asked the U.S. Department of Transportation to speed up a requirement that companies and drivers use electronic devices to log hours driven, he told a Manhattan news conference. He said most truck drivers currently log their hours manually.

"We know that fatigue is a huge issue in terms of the number of crashes, and you can't rely on companies to set the rules themselves, because they're going to be competitive," he said, adding that unsafely long working hours can come from clients demanding that materials get to a location faster. "So we need rules that set a level playing field."

Schumer also wants the DOT to issue a study and increase insurance coverage by trucking companies in the case of a massive accident.

The current minimum liability for trucks is $750,000, and the minimum is $5 million for trucks carrying hazardous materials.

The agency did not immediately respond to an inquiry about Schumer's requests.

Morgan and two others were critically injured and comedian James McNair was killed in a June 7 accident involving their limo bus and a tractor-trailer.

The driver at the wheel of the Wal-Mart truck acknowledged that he had not slept for 24 hours, according to a criminal complaint against him. The company said they believe 35-year-old Kevin Roper was complying with existing federal regulations.

Schumer said electronic devices would help keep people from falsifying records.

In 2010, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration suggested that such devices be installed in trucks, but the proposal has not been approved by the federal government.

"To have a rule like this, which affects the safety of the truck drivers themselves and every motorist on the road, languish for four years, is just too much," Schumer said. "So I say to the federal Motor Carrier Administration, get it done and get it done now."

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