

August 26, 2008: Weekly Washington Update

Virginia is the number two importer of trash in the nation, taking some seven million tons into our landfills in 2007 alone. Earlier this summer, I introduced the Solid Waste Interstate Transportation Act of 2008, H.R. 6166. This legislation would give states and localities greater control to regulate waste levels by giving them the ability to limit imports to their landfill facilities.

Importing excessive, unregulated amounts of trash has a significant impact on Virginia's infrastructure. Aside from the obvious environmental hazards, many trucks hauling the waste do not meet safety standards and pose a threat to those on the road. Operating unsafe trucks on the roads, especially rural roads, is taking an unnecessary risk.

I spent last Thursday morning with Sheriff Charlie Jett and his deputies in Stafford County who are specially trained in truck inspections. They deputized me and allowed me to participate in the inspection of trucks on Route 3, just outside a landfill on the King George County line. Inspection of these trucks includes checking the brakes, weight, if the load is properly secured, the load cover, and that all markings are in the correct place.

Through the course of our afternoon, we inspected ten trucks, four of which were hauling trash into Virginia. We found that three trucks were in violation of U.S. Department of Transportation commercial trucking regulations. One of these trucks was importing out-of-state waste and in such a poor state it had to be removed from service immediately.

Thursday's inspections demonstrated why states like Virginia must have the power to regulate trash imports. It is common sense that we regulate an industry that puts our citizens at risk and that we take steps to eliminate those that are operating in an unsafe manner. Furthermore, while importing trash does bring money into the state today, the cost of repairing and maintaining those landfills once they begin to fail will dwarf present day returns. Put simply, we are taking on a massive financial and environmental risk for a quick payoff in the near term.

With the immediate and long term stress that this practice places on our infrastructure and environment, state and local governments should have the ability to say "no" to trash imports if they choose to. I'm pleased to continue working with many stakeholders in Virginia's First District and in Washington to make sure this reform is enacted.