



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

National Owner/Operator Month – August 2004

Yes, you've read the title correctly: August is National Owner/Operator Month, a time to recognize those who've chosen one of the most difficult, time consuming and labour intensive ways imaginable to make a buck (and sometimes not much more than that). Don't bother looking for confirmation anywhere else for news about National Owner-Operator Month because I've just started the ball rolling myself.

It's now been two years since The Owner-Operator's Business Association was officially formed. It's time to highlight once again the thousands of owner/operators across Canada who each day take a deep breath, summon all their personal resources and get out on the nation's highways trying to stickhandle their way through the maze of hyper-competition, competing regulations, carrier/customer priorities and government interference.

Add the ever increasing amount of traffic (even more pronounced this season with recreational vehicles) and the damnable nature of getting mindless over-priced machinery to co-operate without breaking down at the most inconvenient opportunity and you've got all the ingredients required to make the strong weak, the young old and the most optimistic turn into cynics.

As of this writing, we've just learned the results of the federal election. The minority government scenario may not seem like the most stable of situations for business but it's the absolutely best time possible to lobby government, when they've been rocked back on their heels, for attention to the many crucial issues facing the trucking industry.

First, fuel taxes. Granted, there's not much that the Canadian Government can do about the world price of oil but there is a lot that they can do about the domestic taxation of this commodity. In particular they can revisit the trucking industry's demand that fuel tax-

es be returned to the source in the form of dramatically increased spending on highway infrastructure.

If government is serious about increasing relations with our largest trading partner, then now's the time to make the improvements necessary to the road system while our currency is strong, unemployment is relatively low and the federal deficit shows continuing signs of getting under control. Our level of competitiveness depends on this.

Second, border security. The wildly unstable international situation is a constant and unsettling source of concern. Nevertheless, this mustn't be allowed to interfere with the movement of thousands of commercial vehicles daily crossing the border into the United States. We must resign ourselves to the fact that these are troubled times for our southern neighbours. They are facing a presidential election promising to be more rancorous and potentially divisive than any in recent memory. Their 'withdrawal' from Iraq will haunt them for months and possibly years to come. Don't be surprised if the border becomes even tighter.

Again, now is the time to press for further steps to assist the legitimate flow of international traffic. The lineups of the past several months can't be allowed to persist simply because the US has found itself in a precarious international position. Which leads to...

Third, hours-of-service. The newly adopted standard (in the US) is severely cramping the ability of drivers to legally conduct a day's work. Now that the 14-hour workday has been forced on the industry, the last thing that we need is unnecessary, bureaucratic delays at the border. Both federal governments need to get onside with improvements to the flow of international commercial traffic. If that requires the increased use of non-invasive, surveillance techniques such as cargo x-rays, then so be



Mike Smith: OBAC board member

it...anything to keep the wheels turning.

Trucking companies and, in particular owner/operators, are already taking a massive hit in the wallet when it comes to the frustrating delays imposed on them by poorly organized and over zealous inspection procedures at the US border.

In particular, the FAST lanes have not proved to be as effective at speeding up the cross-border flow as originally promised. To both governments we say, "Figure it out, get it right and get on with it!"

OBAC's own summer schedule includes appearances at all the major truck shows from Notre-Dame-du-Nord and Lansdowne (July 18th) to Fergus, Calgary, Mission and Abbotsford. Our intrepid executive director, Joanne Ritchie, will be in attendance armed with information kits for owner/operators and drivers.

This gives us an opportunity to announce that for groups of 10 or more owner/operators we are offering a discount of 20 per cent from the regular membership price, which is already less than 40 cents per day to support an organization that gives a voice to their sector of the industry. This discount applies anytime.

We'll also be extending the 20 per cent discount for individual owner/operators who sign up at one of the truck shows this year and putting their names in a hat for a draw for their January 2005 truck payment, to be taken care of courtesy of OBAC. Let's see the federal government top that for being proactive.