

U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree Whistle Stop
Remarks: FMCSA Deputy Administrator
Allotted Time: 3-5 minutes

Opening

Thank you for that introduction. And good evening, everyone.

I want to thank TCA and the U.S. Forest Service for organizing this great event. I also want to thank the Maryland Theater for hosting us here in Hagerstown. It's an honor to be part of this annual tradition to safely bring the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree to Washington, D.C.

Safety is what we are all about at FMCSA, as our mission is to reduce crashes, injuries, and fatalities involving large trucks and buses – just like the large truck we see carrying this year's Capitol Christmas Tree all the way from Alaska.

Driver Spotlight

I'd like to take a minute to spotlight and thank the professional truck drivers who have been responsible for delivering this year's tree, making many stops across the country between Alaska and D.C. The two of them have a combined 100 years of driving experience in their careers!

- **John Schank**, who has been driving for around 50 years, has over 6 million driving miles logged. He was named the 2014 and 2017 Driver of the Year by the Alaska Trucking Association. And he carried the Capitol Christmas Tree across the country before in 2015.
- **Fred Austin** has also been driving for around 50 years and has logged over 4 million driving miles. In 2015, at age 79, he took the Alaska state test for Methods of Instruction Training and passed, making history as the oldest person to sit for the state test.

John and Fred, on behalf of FMCSA and the U.S. Department of Transportation, thank you for helping deliver this year's tree safely, and for the excellent work that you have done throughout your careers. Let's give them a round of applause!

Freight & Economy – Importance of Trucking

While we celebrate John and Fred for their work today, I think it's also important that we take a moment to recognize the work of all our drivers. Because every day, we rely on our nation's truck and bus drivers to help keep goods and people moving, just like the Capitol Christmas Tree.

Truck drivers are the backbone of our economy and a critical part of our nation's supply chain. In fact, truck drivers are responsible for moving over 72% of all freight in this country every day.

Through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the U.S. Department of Transportation continues to make historic investments in safety and infrastructure to strengthen our supply chain and bolster our nation's trucking workforce, helping keep people and goods moving.

A healthy supply chain is especially important during the holiday season, and without a strong workforce of truck and bus drivers, the holidays would look much different for all of us.

Truck drivers are delivering the food that we will share for holidays meals. They are delivering the decorations that will be put up around houses and neighborhoods. They are delivering presents that will brighten lives across this country.

And we can't forget our bus drivers. They are helping thousands upon thousands of travelers get home to see family and friends for the holidays.

Share the Road Safely

During the holiday season, we of course not only see more large trucks delivering goods on our roads, but also more vehicles in general, full of people traveling.

So, as you make your holiday travel plans, please think about the commitment of our truck and bus drivers.

I already mentioned that the core of our mission at FMCSA is safety, and we have been making progress on that mission. But we can't accomplish this work alone, and we need your help.

Please remember to share the road safely with large trucks and buses. We've seen that done so far with the large truck carrying the Capitol Christmas Tree from

Alaska to D.C. But we must maintain that same commitment throughout the holiday season.

Do your part to help our truck and bus drivers perform their jobs safely and then get home to their families. And that will help all of you get to your destinations safely as well, so we can continue to enjoy this holiday season.

Closing

Thank you to everyone who is here today. And thank you again to John, Fred, and all our nation's truck drivers for the work you do every day to keep our supply chain healthy, especially during this joyous time of year.

On behalf of FMCSA, I wish you a wonderful and safe holiday season.