

# NOT WAITING O



## *Trucking Alliance takes on the big issues*

Photography by John David Pittman

LEFT TO RIGHT: Gary Salisbury, Chris Lofgren, Kevin Knight, Steve Williams and Craig Harper

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# IN WASHINGTON



**By Eric Francis**  
*Contributing Writer*

It all began as a casual conversation between colleagues. Five senior transportation executives concluded what so many eventually do when discussing politics – things never to get done in Washington, D.C. Even changes that make common sense don't happen.

They were particularly frustrated about rules that govern the trucking industry – many of which were needed, but were languishing in federal agencies for years, even decades. Further, the national associations hired to represent the trucking industry on Capitol Hill were often hamstrung, unable to move quickly because of the wide ranging opinions and diverse memberships they represented.

But these executives aren't known for their patience; and a couple issues they felt could make the highways safer, improve industry efficiencies and would force trucking companies to obey the law needed to become reality.

So, in the summer of 2010, these executives decided to strike out on their own and try a new approach. They incorporated the Alliance for Driver Safety & Security in Washington, D.C. Now called The Trucking Alliance and began their campaign for reform.

They believed the idea of creating a national database that could keep drug abusers out of their trucks and off the nation's highways made perfect sense. Yet, the idea had been buried in a federal agency for more than 10 years.

Another proposal – to require electronic logging devices in all commercial trucks to ensure drivers don't exceed their number of hours behind the wheel – was also bogged



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“THE CUSTOMER ASKS, ‘WHEN ARE YOU GUYS GOING TO GROW AGAIN?’ AND I SAY, ‘WELL, WHEN THE TRUCKS WE HAVE ARE DEPLOYED IN A WAY THAT THEY GET A FAIR RETURN TO OUR SHAREHOLDERS. OUR SHAREHOLDERS CAN’T BE A SHOCK ABSORBER IN THE ECONOMY TO THE EXTENT YOU WANT US TO ESSENTIALLY CREATE CAPACITY.’”

—CRAIG HARPER,  
EVP & COO, J.B. HUNT TRANSPORT

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Harper

down in a host of advisory groups and studies.

In both cases, the technologies were there, the ability of the industry to comply was there. All that was needed was a push – a big push to make bureaucrats do what they are paid to do, and make the ideas actually happen.

### AN ALLIANCE IS FORMED

These five executives, each of whom were well-known within the industry, comprised the first board of directors of The Trucking Alliance.

Steve Williams, chairman and CEO of Maverick Transportation of North Little Rock, Ark., and former chairman of the American Trucking Associations (ATA), was named chair-

man. Craig Harper, executive vice president and chief operating officer of J.B. Hunt Transport in Lowell, Ark., was elected president. The directors were Chris Lofgren, president and CEO of Schneider National, Green Bay, Wis.; Kevin Knight, CEO and executive committee chairman of Knight Transportation, Phoenix, and the late Patrick Quinn, president and co-chairman of U.S. Xpress of Chattanooga, Tenn., another former ATA chairman.

They had two major objectives – to see the national drug and alcohol clearinghouse become a reality and to require electronic on-board recorders (EOBRs) or electronic logging devices (ELDs) in all commercial trucks.

But their strategy was different.

Rather than push the bureaucrats to actually do something, they decided to go to Congress and convince it to mandate the two ideas and force the agency to act. That was a tall proposition considering 98 percent of all bills introduced in Congress never see the light of day.

But the Alliance board is not a lazy group. Rather than hire full time employees, the Alliance contracted with the Arkansas Trucking Association to manage its advocacy efforts, an affiliation that continues today.

“Our strategy was simple,” said Lane Kidd, president of the Arkansas Trucking Association who also serves as senior manager for the Alliance.



Lofgren, Knight and Williams

“Nobody knew the Alliance, but congressmen certainly knew the names of the companies in the Alliance and the number of people they employed in their districts.”

And those relationships resulted in U.S. Senator Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) introducing the two bills in the Senate; Congressmen Rick Crawford (R-Ark.) and Reid Ribble (R-Wis.) did the same in the House of Representatives.

There were many detractors, mostly from within the trucking industry. One senior trucking lobbyist remarked that the Trucking Alliance wouldn't get its EOBR legislation heard in committee, much less put up for a vote. And since the proposals were already in the regulatory channels at the U.S. Department of Transportation, others wondered why Congress would even bother to consider them.

But as Chris Lofgren would later remark, “We didn't know we couldn't be successful.”

The Trucking Alliance launched

a strategic approach, reaching out to those congressmen who had employees of the five trucking companies living in their districts. The strategy proved effective.

Sen. Pryor, joined by the late U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), was able to vote both bills out of the Senate Commerce Committee and later, passed both measures through the U.S. Senate.

Soon after, the American Trucking Associations voted to join the effort.

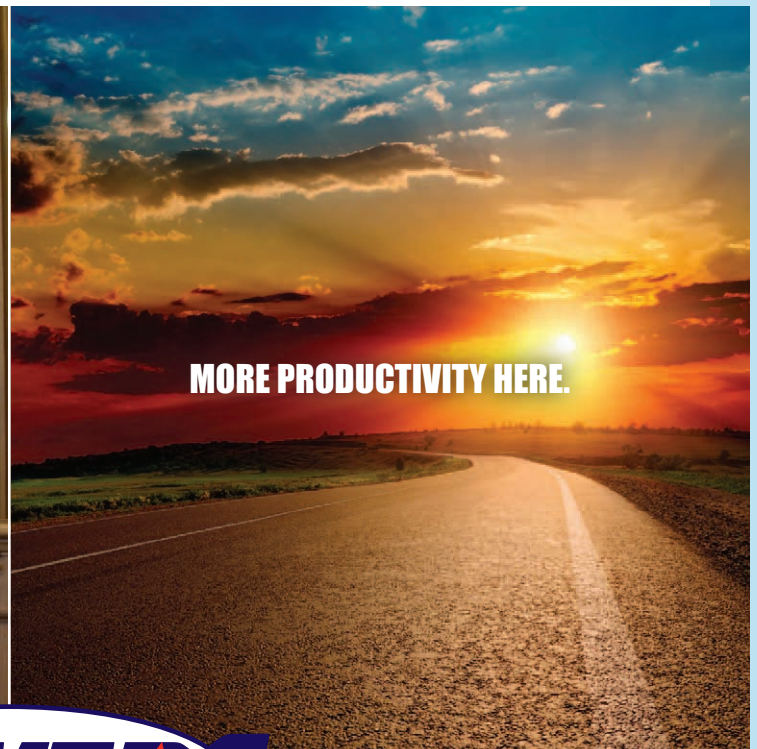
When Congress passed a long-awaited transportation bill in 2012, the drug and alcohol clearinghouse and the electronic logging mandate were in the bill. In fact, other than a couple of studies, the two measures were the only trucking-specific laws passed in the legislation.

Sen. Pryor and others gave the Trucking Alliance much of the credit for spearheading the effort to pass the legislation. Those efforts gave the Trucking Alliance newfound credibility on Capitol Hill that continues today.

While it does not actively recruit new members, today the Trucking Alliance has 17 affiliated corporations and two new board members. Heartland Express recently accepted an invitation to join and Mike Gerdin, chairman and CEO, will soon become a member of the Alliance board of directors. And Gary Salisbury, president of Fikes Truck Line, former Truckload Carriers Association chairman and current chairman of the Arkansas Trucking Association, now sits on the board replacing the late Pat Quinn.

While meeting at the historic Capital Hotel in downtown Little Rock, Ark., the Alliance directors took a break to discuss their views on industry profitability, the EOBR mandate and the future of the Alliance.

Facilitated by Lane Kidd, the discussion included Craig Harper, Kevin Knight, Steve Williams, Chris Lofgren and Gary Salisbury.



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## PROFITABILITY FACTORS

“Think about profitability in your own companies,” said Kidd, opening the conversation. “You’re all successful executives. And as you’re looking at 2014 and beyond, what are the keys to profitability in your companies, other than getting higher prices?”

“Recruiting, training and retention of drivers,” said Williams. “You better be good at all of those or you’re going to be a lot smaller in about a year.”

And one way of getting drivers, Williams said, is to acquire other companies of similar operation, citing Heartland Express’s recent purchase of Gordon Trucking. “Finding drivers can certainly contribute to consolidation as well,” he added.

Consolidation is less a concern at J.B. Hunt Transport, observed Harper although the company continues to look at ways to maximize a driver’s efficiency. “We’re continuing to look

for ways for the driver to simply get to drive,” Harper said. “There are so many inefficiencies in the system that hurt the driver’s ability to actually work, and we deal with those on a daily basis,” he continued. “So we’re trying to find what those are and address them as fast as we can.”

Kevin Knight agreed with Harper, adding, “It’s going to take a lot of cooperation from the customer to help us with that, because we can only do so much. And I would say we’re all probably doing about 85 to 90 percent of what we can do—especially with electronic logging device—to have better information.”

Which means it comes down to “when we can load and when we can unload,” Knight said, and that requires working closely with customers.

## RECORDERS ARE THE KEY

To Williams, the widespread use of

EOBRs is helping the industry combat inefficiency because of the tremendous amount of useful data they provide.

Williams said electronic logging will accurately show how much time the driver spends behind the wheel. “Everyone keeps talking about the efficiency that’s gained with EOBRs, with some saying its two percent and others saying it can go as high as 25 percent.”

Whatever the gain, Williams said a big contributor is that EOBRs force companies and drivers to run legally.

Lofgren said the ELDs show you have to be extremely efficient in this industry. “Getting customers to realize their role in efficiency will be a big key going forward,” Lofgren said.

“We’re preaching the message to customers that, ‘Look, drivers and people using our equipment as productively as they can are going to be our customers of choice,’” said Lofgren. “And we’re already lining them up.”

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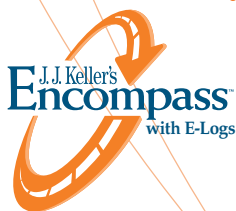
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“AS THEY WORK THROUGH THE MYTHS AND THE TRUCK STOP TALK, THEY START TO EMBRACE THE IDEA OF EOBRs. THEY REALIZE THEY CAN BE PRODUCTIVE AND EFFICIENT AND MAKE MONEY DOING IT. IT’S SLOW, BUT WE’RE GETTING THERE.”  
—GARY SALISBURY,  
PRESIDENT, FIKES TRUCK LINE

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All agreed, however, that for all the advantages of electronic logging devices, there still is one downside to fitting your fleet with them – not everybody is doing it, and those that aren’t have the financial edge until the mandate is fully implemented across the industry.

Kidd said there will be another “massive pushback” from certain sectors of the industry after the federal government rolled out the final rule. Although the Alliance has led the way in their adoption, there is still some uncertainty, especially among smaller carriers, about making that long-term investment, he said.

“We have executives who say, ‘I’m running legal and I’m committed to running legal, but I want to see my return on investment,’” said Kidd.

Craig Harper agreed. “It’s hard for a carrier that runs legally to compete. That carrier is looking at its cost and seeing what it can generate with that device and realizing it takes them two days to do the work someone else, without the device, can do in one day because they run illegally.”

Knight agreed. “When all of our drivers are having to compete against people who aren’t doing it the right way, that puts us in a position where we

aren’t able to be in the game. And that puts us in a position where we aren’t able to award our drivers in the right way.”

For Salisbury, whose fleet is much smaller than those of his colleagues, the decision back in the spring to mandate electronic logging devices for his owner-operators had immediate consequences.

“Basically about 38 percent of our owner-operators left,” said Salisbury, drawing concerned reactions from the others. “And as an owner-operator company, that left us with a lot less capacity to give our shippers than we committed to the year before and that’s been a challenge.”

And just as he’d heard discussed at various times, those drivers went “right down the street to a carrier that’s not running ELDs.”

The conversation turned much more personal as Salisbury talked about the challenges he’s facing as a small carrier in converting his fleet to ELDs.

Williams later remarked that the close nature among the executives is characteristic of the way they have worked together in the Alliance. “We actually care about what we are trying to achieve for our companies and there is a camaraderie here. Plus we can

make decisions around a table,” he said. “We don’t have committees that meet twice a year. We see the problem and we tackle it.”

Salisbury continued. “The customers are an issue in this,” he said. “They say they care, they say that they’re worried about safety, but what we’ve seen is if you can’t do it, if you can’t get that load there in the morning, they have 10 other carriers behind you that will.

“And it’s been a real struggle,” Salisbury said, “much like a balancing act between staying true to your beliefs about safety and looking at the bottom line. I mean, virtually, it’s gotten down to, ‘How are you going to stay in business if you do things the right way?’”

The conversation turned to the urgency to see the congressional ELD mandate fully implemented throughout the industry. Kidd commented that many company owners, understanding that ELDs will soon be a reality, are banking on there being no delays that would slow the mandate from becoming reality.

“Some have said, ‘okay, I’m halfway through the tunnel now and there’s no way to back out,’” said Kidd.

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—STEVE WILLIAMS,  
CHAIRMAN & CEO, MAVERICK USA  
CHAIRMAN, THE TRUCKING ALLIANCE

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“You can’t back out,” agreed Salisbury. “You can’t stop now, it’s just too critical. And I believe in it. That’s been a learning curve and our guys are embracing the program. As they work through the myths and the truck stop talk, they start to embrace the idea of EOBRs. They realize they can be productive and efficient and make money doing it. Now a lot of guys come in and request it. It’s slow, but we’re getting there.”

Williams said he believes one of the long-term benefits of The Alliance’s push for mandatory EOBRs will be a payoff in the area of Compliance - Safety - Accountability (CSA) scoring. And he thinks it’s one that both drivers and companies will be on the winning side of.

“Now they say, ‘Hey look, I like it. It makes my life easy. I know how to work within it,’” said Williams. “You hope that when the mandate comes in, there should be advantages to those who chose to make the commitment early.”

Knight weighed in, calling the push for mandatory EOBRs “the best thing about the Alliance, from my perspective.” But there were still regulatory issues that need to be tackled.

“We also need FMCSA and our agencies to work with us, because I can tell you, since we deployed ELDs, we’re safer. Since we deployed hair testing instead of urine testing, we’re safer,” Knight said. “But there are other regulations we’ve been required to deploy that are not making us safer, so instead of

agencies getting headstrong, we need them to sit down and listen and work with us.”

Williams commented that The Trucking Alliance has made strides in working with FMCSA because The Alliance vowed not to sue simply because it didn’t like a proposal. “I think taking the high road is a nice road to be on. It’s not hard to defend the high road. That priority list is what’s in the best interest of our country, the best interest of our industry and finally the best interest of our individual company.”

### THE TRUCKLOAD MODEL IS HISTORY

To Williams, there is another issue facing the industry that could have even broader implications on how companies run.

“I’ll make a general statement – the truckload business model is dead,” Williams said. “That’s true even though the model was part of the reason this industry was so efficient since deregulation.”

In the past, explained Williams, the truckload model was the cheapest way to move freight from Point A to Point B – one guy driving the most direct route with a full load. But if that load originated in Little Rock, had a destination in Chicago, was departing on a Thursday and the driver lived in Birmingham, “the truckload model made that guy stay on the road and not go home that weekend.

“It used to be that we really didn’t care about the driver, and so he was out another weekend. And it worked for a long time but it won’t today,” said Williams. “Knowing that the model has critical flaws is causing change and so companies have created regional networks, others have created intermodal capabilities, or dedicated fleets and greater attention to driver amenities, all those changes are simply because the truckload model is outdated and doesn’t work.

“I think the demographics of our workforce, the laws of supply and demand, an economy and a population that is growing all of these factors will contribute,” said Williams, “so recruiting, training and retaining drivers will be the keys to maintaining capacity.”

Harper also addressed another change in the traditional truckload model – the inability of carriers to meet a shipper’s surge capacity. “A shipper used to have a peak time, maybe during Christmas, and during that time the carrier would supply him with more trucks and driver hours,” said Harper.

“During those surge periods, everybody made more money,” Harper continued. “But with EOBRs, you do what you can and nothing more. So there is no room for surge capacity.”

“And what’s crazy about that is when the customer requires you to have specialized equipment,” added Williams, eliciting a round of knowing laughter.

*some people talk*

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**Knight**

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“I REALLY BELIEVE THAT IF WE AND OUR CUSTOMERS CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER THERE’S A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO MITIGATE SOME OF THE COST WE WOULD OTHERWISE ACCRUE. AND IF WE DON’T GET IN FRONT OF [LOADING TIME], LIKE WE GOT IN FRONT OF SOME OF THESE OTHER ISSUES, THEN THERE IS ONLY ONE THING THAT’S GOING TO HAPPEN: IT’S GOING TO BE WORSE. IT’S GOING TO BE MORE EXPENSIVE, AND IT ISN’T GOING TO WORK AS WELL.”

—KEVIN KNIGHT, CEO & EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, KNIGHT TRANSPORTATION

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Further challenging the quest for efficiency, Harper said, is the shipper telling a driver when he arrives with freight to be unloaded, to go out back and wait.

“Shippers should realize that when the driver arrives at the dock, his ‘on duty’ meter is running,” he said, to a chorus of “yes” from the others. “And people need to attack that trailer and get that trailer unloaded and loaded as fast as they can.”

“They’re not going to until they’re forced,” suggested Knight.

“Unless they have to pay for those delays,” said Kidd.

Knight said the turnaround needed to be treated the way Southwest Airlines handles loading and unloading its planes, and Harper seized on that as a perfect example.

“I was in Branson not too long ago flying Southwest,” Harper recalled,

“and it looked like we were going to be leaving 20 minutes late. Well, they got on the loudspeaker and said, ‘Okay, the plane is within distance and it’s going to be here soon. Please start lining up and be ready to go.’ We actually ended up leaving on time because they made up for that late arrival by getting us loaded so much more quickly.”

Harper believes the solution is working with customers to impress

## TRUCKING ALLIANCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### STEVE WILLIAMS, CHAIRMAN

Steve Williams founded the privately held Maverick Transportation in 1980 and currently serves as owner, chairman and CEO. The Maverick companies—consisting of Maverick Transportation, Maverick Logistics and Maverick Leasing—employ 1,500 workers and operate more than 1,200 tractors serving the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Born in 1953, Williams grew up in a small Missouri town where he learned from his father, a steel hauler. In 1975, he went to work for Steel Haulers, leading their operations in Little Rock, Ark. Then in 1980, with only one truck, he went into business with co-worker and friend Larry Leahy, forming Maverick Transportation.

Williams serves on the Arkansas Trucking Association Board of Directors, was elected three times as chairman of the Arkansas Trucking Association and is a former chairman of the American Trucking Associations in 2005, where he also serves on the board of directors. Additionally, Williams sat on the executive committee of the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies and currently acts as chairman of the American Transportation Research Institute.

### GARY SALISBURY

Gary Salisbury began his multi-faceted career as an owner-operator operating under his own authority prior to leasing to Fikes, and now, 30 years later, he is president and CEO of Fikes Truck Line, providing flatbed services as well as other freight and utilizing terminals in Arkansas, Alabama, Kentucky and Texas.

His first-hand experience with the driver-side of the transportation equation makes him a sought-after expert on recruitment and retention issues in such organizations as the Truckload Carriers Association where he serves on the Carrier-Shipper Committee.

In 2011 Salisbury served as the chairman of the Truckload Carriers Association where he continues to serve on the Board. In 2012, he accepted the chairmanship for the Arkansas Trucking Association and is slated to become an upcoming chairman of the Texas Trucking Association.

### KEVIN KNIGHT

Kevin P. Knight founded Knight Transportation with his brother, Keith, and cousins Gary and Randy in 1990. They each had an advanced degree in trucking from their previous employer, Swift Transportation. From 1975 to 1984 and again from 1986 to 1990, he



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—CHRIS LOFGREN,  
PRESIDENT & CEO,  
SCHNEIDER NATIONAL

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upon them the urgency of needing quicker turnarounds and to help the carrier identify inefficiencies in the pickup and delivery process. Kidd questioned whether the industry was bold enough to take that stance.

“I think we are bold enough,” said Knight. “I really believe that if we and our customers continue to work together there’s a great opportunity to mitigate some of the cost we would otherwise accrue. And if we don’t get in front of this, like we got in front of some of these other issues, then there

is only one thing that’s going to happen: It’s going to be worse. It’s going to be more expensive, and it isn’t going to work as well.”

Harper pointed out that a lot of customers raised questions of capacity when carriers talked about finding ways to make operations more efficient, and noted that J.B. Hunt hasn’t increased the size of its fleet in four years.

“The customer asks, ‘When are you guys going to grow again?’ And I said, ‘Well, when the trucks we have are deployed in a way that they get a fair

return to our shareholders. Our shareholders can’t be a shock absorber in the economy to the extent you want us to essentially create capacity,’” said Harper.

### THE ALLIANCE GOING FORWARD

For Schneider, the largest privately-owned truckload carrier in the U.S., there’s no magic in 2014 other than concentrating on the issues the industry is already facing, with drivers and their time allowed by the government to work being paramount, said Lofgren.



served as executive vice president and president of Cooper Motor Lines, Inc., a Swift subsidiary.

Since May 1999, Kevin P. Knight has served as the chairman of the Board of Directors of Knight Transportation and has served as CEO since 1993.

Knight currently serves on the Board of Directors and Executive Committee of the American Trucking Associations.

### CHRIS LOFGREN

Chris Lofgren has been president, CEO and a director of Schneider National, Inc. since 2002 and has been with the company since 1994. Prior to joining Schneider National, Lofgren held several positions at Symantec Corp., a security, storage and systems management solutions company.

Schneider, Inc. is a premier provider of transportation and logistics services enhancing the standard of living worldwide. Founded in 1935 when Al Schneider sold the family car to buy his first truck, Schneider is headquartered in Green Bay, Wis., and conducts business worldwide. In 2010, Schneider proudly celebrated its 75th anniversary.

Lofgren currently serves on the board of directors of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Trucking Associations and the American Transportation Research Institute. He also serves on the Advisory Board of the College of Engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology and the Georgia Tech Advisory Board. He was inducted into the National Academy of Engineering in 2009.

### CRAIG HARPER

A graduate of the University of Arkansas, Craig Harper began his business career as a stockbroker for Kidder Peabody before entering the commercial real estate market in Dallas. He returned to Arkansas in 1991 to manage a hazardous waste company, but soon after J.B. Hunt acquired the company, Harper moved to northwest Arkansas and joined J.B. Hunt in its special commodities division.

In 1997, Harper was named J. B. Hunt’s Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer where he also manages the truckload division. He is a strong advocate for measures on the trucking industry that can improve safety and reduce accidents involving big trucks.

Craig serves on the Arkansas Trucking Association Board of Directors where he is also the organization’s chairman-elect.



**“I LIKE BEING HERE  
AND [AM] PROUD  
OF THE GENTLEMEN  
AROUND ME FOR  
HELPING LEAD THE  
INDUSTRY TO A HIGHER  
ROAD.”**

**—CHRIS LOFGREN,  
PRESIDENT & CEO,  
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“This is an industry that has massive costs in people assets and physical assets, at percentages much higher than other industries,” Lofgren said. “The airline industry looks like that and they have really struggled to generate returns for shareholders.

“You know, a number of people in this industry have found ways to do that. But it’s just recognizing that, at this point, there really is no price that can overcome the regulations and other things we face,” said Lofgren. “It takes a lot of pennies per mile to overcome a physical asset that is sitting still.”

With its first two initiatives marked

as successes—electronic logging mandate and creation of a drug and alcohol clearinghouse—Lofgren is encouraged and confident in the Trucking Alliance’s future.

“I like being here and proud of the gentlemen around me for helping lead the industry to a higher road,” said Lofgren. “I think that’s what leaders do. And this group represents leaders who have that vision. There are many others out there in the industry who are starting to agree with us. Nothing happens fast enough but that’s all the more reason why we intend to make sure we get it done.”



## TECH,

*Continued from page 21*

aren’t offended by active systems, but they are leery because the computer works faster than they can. Those wor-

ries are assuaged through training, orientation and word of mouth. “Once you get testimonials, once the drivers start talking about it, the product will sell itself,” Newell said. “The fleet will accept it. These systems are so much more advanced than the early systems.”

With the technology evolving so rapidly and more fleets using it, the question becomes, will it eventually be mandated? The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has issued a notice of proposed rule-making that, if the rule is finalized, would require motor carrier manufacturers to include stability control technologies, and the National Traffic Safety Board has recommended NHTSA mandate collision mitigation technology on heavy trucks and passenger cars. New commercial vehicle models above certain weight limits in Europe must have collision mitigation systems and lane departure warnings, with a phase-in for existing models beginning in 2015.

CalArk’s Hare said she can foresee crash avoidance technologies becoming standard someday, though she said the extra costs will be a hardship for some carriers. Maverick’s Newell didn’t know if the systems would be mandated. However, he believes carriers should do all they can to create safer roads.

“My family runs up and down this highway just like you do and your family does, and to me, I think it’s the right thing to do,” he said.



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