

BATTLING GOVERNMENT OVERREACH

Bikes For Beef Roars Back. Motorcyclists Respond

Inattentive drivers turning left in front of us is not the only danger we face as motorcyclists. There is another danger lurking that could be as detrimental to motorcycling in general as distracted driving is to us individually. That danger is the unelected bureaucrat.

This threat is elevated during transition periods between presidential administrations, when there are no political appointees in place to hold the bureaucrats accountable to elected officials who, in turn, are accountable to all of us—the voting public.

In the waning days of the Obama administration, bureaucrats at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative dusted off a proposal they attempted to put forward at least twice before (the last time during the 2008-09 presidential transition) that would impose a 100 percent tariff on 51cc to 500cc motorcycles imported from the European Union. The purpose of this tariff is to retaliate against the European Union for its failure to import enough beef from the United States.

In February, I traveled to Washington, D.C., to testify before an interagency committee empaneled by the USTR on the tariff issue. I pointed out the tariff would cause disproportionate economic harm to U.S. interests, including small- and medium-size businesses and consumers, and I urged the USTR to remove motorcycles from the list of items slated for a tariff.

The hearing was conducted over two days, with panels representing the beef lobby, motorcyclists and the motorcycle industry, and candy and food importers requesting their products be removed from the list.

I want to congratulate my

fellow motorcycling panelists for the great job they did making the case to remove motorcycles from the affected items. (See the story on page 12 for more.)

I was first up on our panel. I explained to the committee that a substantial proportion of AMA membership includes riders who own and ride motorcycles of 500cc displacement or less, including trail bikes and enduro bikes, dual-sport motorcycles, entry-level street motorcycles, scooters and others. I explained further that the 500cc-or-smaller category sees widespread use in the AMA's more than 3,000 sanctioned competition events enjoyed by hundreds of thousands annually and that European makers of 51cc-399cc motorcycles used for racing provide nearly half the units available to U.S. consumers, and nearly a quarter of the market in the 400-500cc class.

Some have argued that European manufacturers should be forced to make their products on U.S. soil. I told the committee that the prospect of European manufacturers moving production to the United States because of a tariff is unlikely. It is more likely that these motorcycles will no longer be available to American consumers.

I discussed the detriment the tariff would have on race promoters and motorcycle dealers and their employees, and I expressed how American consumers who rely on small-displacement motorcycles and

scooters for outdoor recreation and urban riding would suffer.

I was proud to tell the committee that motorcyclists sent more than 10,300 emails to Congress on this issue, posted more than 9,400 comments to Regulations.gov and sent nearly 5,300 emails to President Trump.

The hearing was not without some drama. During the questioning of the panel after all of our prepared remarks, USTR Associate General Counsel and Committee Chair William Busis admitted that motorcycles were included in the proposal as leverage to achieve relief for the beef industry. The admission came as another committee member posed a question to the panel regarding what efforts we had made to get the European Union to resolve this trade dispute in favor of the U.S. beef industry.

I am not making this up!

After sarcastically thanking Chairman Busis for finally providing a rationale, however weak, for dragging motorcycles into an agricultural trade dispute, I admonished him and members of the committee for this cynical approach to trade policy. Such trade policy puts American businesses and American families at risk, not to mention the motorcycle industry in general, which is still recovering from the severe economic downturn.

I concluded by telling the committee that attempting to leverage the grassroots network of the American motorcycling community in this manner is wholly inappropriate.

At press time, this issue had not been resolved. I hope the bureaucrats heard us and will find another way to address the needs of the U.S. beef industry.

Rob Dingman is president and CEO of the AMA.



By Rob Dingman

“The AMA adamantly opposes the proposed tariff because trade disputes residing within the boundaries of the agricultural industry should not be solved with trade sanctions levied against non-agricultural products.”