

Legislation to crack down on unscrupulous Charter carriers introduced

AB 951 to help prevent future tragedies

SACRAMENTO—Assemblymember Ted W. Lieu, Chair of the Asian Pacific Islander Legislative Caucus, recently announced the introduction of Assembly Bill 951 to increase penalties to charter carrier companies that violate safety standards designed to protect passenger safety.

On October 5, 2008, a bus headed from Sacramento to the Colusa Casino flipped over on a country road. The tragic crash resulted in thirty-four injured victims and the death of ten. Many of the victims were Asian Pacific Islanders, including elders from the Hmong, Lu Mien, and Vietnamese community. Bus companies routinely take members of the API community, as well as other minority communities, to casinos across California and out of state. In reports about the case, the driver of the bus did not have the appropriate license to drive a charter carrier and the bus was not registered with the State of California.

"Safety protocols were not followed by this particular bus company, and AB 951 will provide new tools to State Agencies to help prevent such tragedies in the future," stated Assemblymember Ted Lieu. "If faced with higher penalties, bad actors will be forced to pay closer attention and adhere to the policies and procedures designed to protect California's citizens."

AB 951, which is sponsored by the California Bus Association, will provide a stronger hammer by increasing the range of fines the Public Utilities Commission can authorize on negligent and unscrupulous bus companies that

threaten the safety of their passengers.

AB 951 will be double-joined with AB 636, authored by Assemblymember Dave Jones, a bill that will provide impounding authority to the California Highway Patrol and automatic revocation of a charter carrier company's ability to do business in the State for egregious violations.

"Ten of my constituents in the API community died because a rogue charter bus company did not follow the law. To prevent these tragedies, we need to shut down the companies that are not operating safely," explained Assemblymember Dave Jones. ■

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Fed survey sees recovery in late '09 at earliest

WASHINGTON—The businesses on the front lines of the dismal economy say the recession is getting worse in almost every part of the country, and in a bleak new forecast they see no improvement until late this year at the earliest.

A Federal Reserve snapshot of business activity issued Wednesday, March 4, showed widespread declines in production, from the factories of Cleveland to the high-tech firms of Texas and California, in blue-collar construction jobs and at white-collar accounting firms.

The survey, known as the Beige Book, rated the prospects for economic improvement anytime soon as "poor, with a significant pickup not expected before late 2009 or early 2010."

Factories exposed to the housing industry were hardest hit. Construction equipment and materials, such as primary metals, wood products and electrical equipment, saw especially steep drops in production. So did makers of furniture and cars.

The only bright spots were in food, drugs and biotechnology products.

Consumer spending was "very weak," the survey found—no surprise to Mark Steinke, owner of Revival, a Chicago antiques and home decor store, where sales are down 20 percent this year, cutting into Steinke's own paycheck.

"The first thing out of people's mouth is 'How are you doing? Are you going to survive?'" he said. "Everyone is waiting for another shoe to drop, which is not good."

The survey summarizes information, most of it anecdotal, supplied to the Fed's 12 regional banks. In 10 of those regions, economic activity worsened. In the two others, Philadelphia and Chicago, the economies merely "remained weak," the survey said.

The Fed will use the Beige Book as one factor in its discussions when Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke and his colleagues meet March 17-18.

At that meeting, the Fed is widely expected to hold interest rates steady, at their record low. The widely watched federal funds rate is already almost as low as it can

go, set at a range of zero to 0.25 percent.

The Fed also has said it will consider expanding existing relief programs or come up with new ones to battle the worst financial crisis since the 1930s.

Still, most economists believe the recession will drag on at least for most of this year, even after the enactment of President Barack Obama's \$787 billion stimulus package. Bernanke told Congress on Tuesday, March 3, that the impact of the stimulus package is subject to "considerable uncertainty."

On Friday, March 6, the government will release its February jobs data, and economists expect the unemployment rate to rise from its January level of 7.6 percent.

The Fed survey said there were "steep declines" in manufacturing activity in some sectors, and "pronounced declines overall."

Factories are getting hit by slower demand at home and overseas, where foreign customers are coping with their own economic troubles. In the Cleveland region, overall factory production dropped about 25 percent compared with a year earlier.

"Traditionally, we start to pick up in our business starting in February, with orders, and we're not seeing that at all," said Tod Oliva, president of Extrudex, a plastic parts manufacturer near Cleveland. "We're just dropping off completely."

In the Dallas and San Francisco regions, makers of computers, semiconductors and other information technology products reported that production and orders had fallen.

Among the encouraging signs, the Boston region reported sales were growing at a double-digit pace for biopharmaceutical firms. The Chicago region reported strong demand for drugs, and the Richmond, Va., region noted temporary hiring at drug companies.

In the San Francisco and Philadelphia regions, processors of food and certain chemicals reported a pickup in business. And airplane makers in the St. Louis region are planning to expand production, according to the Fed survey. (AP)

NaFFAA chair meets with Nevada chapter

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benta told members of NaFF AA, Nevada during its annual membership meeting in Las Vegas last February 28.

Macabenta was in Las Vegas to meet with the organization's Nevada chapter where he outlined his future plans for NaFFAA.

He said NaFFAA will coordinate with other state agencies and local organizations to organize these foreclosure prevention meetings that are expected to help stop the downward spiral of the real estate market in Las Vegas.

NaFFAA recently began holding foreclosure prevention workshops for Filipinos in Northern California, in response to the crumbling national housing market that started last year.

In Las Vegas, foreclosures last year tripled to 31,416 from only 11,509 the previous year, data from California-based Foreclosures.com showed. Nevada had the highest foreclosure rate at 4.99 percent.

Macabenta said that both legal assistance and foreclosure prevention workshops are part of NaFFAA's top objectives of providing institutionalized member and community services to Filipinos.

Other objectives of the organization include expanding its membership base, broadening advocacy in key community needs, achieving financial stability, and building its leadership base.

NaFFAA is a non-partisan, non-profit national affiliation of more than five hundred Filipino-American institutions and umbrella organizations. Its core mission is to empower Filipinos in the United States.

Macabenta, during last Saturday's presentation, said that empowerment of Filipinos can be achieved by becoming active members of American society.

"Filipinos are the second largest Asian ethnic group in the US. It is the largest group in California and in Las Vegas, possibly even the entire state of Nevada," he said.

"But participants in mainstream politics and mainstream endeavors are still limited," he added.

NaFFAA Nevada Chapter state chair Jing Espiritu also said, "We need to coalesce Filipino-Am groups with Asians, and with other mainstream groups in the community."

Meanwhile, four new NaFFAA members were sworn in during last Saturday's Nevada membership meeting. These are J. Vic Austria, Salve Vargas Spensko-Edelman, Maan Pahang, and Rita Vaswani. (D. Calica-La Putt)

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