



How Utah Sen. Mike Lee proposes to stop the Grinch from stealing Christmas

Republican senator wants to relax some federal laws to break up supply chain backlogs

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Utah Sen. Mike Lee has proposed relaxing some federal regulations to ease supply chain and inflation pressures that he says would take the Grinch out of Christmas as Americans head into the holiday shopping season.

The Utah Republican, who was recently in Asia with Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, to get a firsthand look at supply chain and security issues, wants to streamline or suspend certain federal regulations on ports, ships and trucks.

Empty shelves and backlogged ports have wreaked havoc on U.S. businesses and families over the past few months, while inflation is taking a toll on people's pocketbooks, according to Lee.

"The supply chain crisis is making Thanksgiving meals, Christmas gifts and everyday necessities more expensive and harder to get," he said.

The cost of a Thanksgiving dinner for 10 people is up 14% over last year, averaging at \$53.31, according to the Farm Bureau. The meal includes turkey, stuffing mix, sweet potatoes, rolls with butter, peas, cranberries, a veggie tray, pumpkin pie with whipped cream, coffee and milk, with enough for leftovers. The turkey itself costs 24% more than last year, the group said.

Lee said it's time for Congress to make a targeted response to, at least temporarily, address supply chain challenges and help the country weather the storm. He said his proposal would get holiday products off of ships, onto trucks and into stores.

"At each stage, we've got federal regulations currently delaying the process, and this bill would relax some of those restrictions, at least for a season to make sure we can undo the backlog," he said on KSL-TV.

This month, Lee introduced the Surpassing Temporary Obstructions at Ports and Guaranteeing Resources to Increase the Nation's Commercial Health Act — or the STOP the GRINCH Act.

Rep. Michelle Fischbach, R-Minn., is the lead sponsor of the same legislation in the House.

“President Biden and Speaker Pelosi think the answer to the supply chain crisis is more wasteful spending and more heavy regulation. They are wrong, and with the holiday season upon us we can’t risk making this crisis worse,” he said.

Lee, too, blames Biden and congressional Democrats for inflation, saying rising prices on everyday goods are being “turbocharged” by Congress spending money it doesn’t have.

“If we don’t stop this runaway train, inflation could get worse,” he said last month. “The best way to strengthen our shared prosperity is to rein in spending and return to the pro-growth policies that made the pre-pandemic economy so successful.”

Lee said supply chain impacts are even greater than holiday shipping delays. The crisis is already negatively impacting businesses’ bottom lines, increasing consumer prices and contributing to broader inflationary pressures, he said.

Lee’s legislation would authorize several temporary regulatory waivers and actions in order to help alleviate some of the stress in the freight network supply chain.

Scott Lincicome, a senior fellow in economic studies at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank in Washington, D.C., called Lee’s bill “really smart.”

Specifically, the bill would:

- Require the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to temporarily waive (with some exceptions) the trucking hours of service requirements for truck drivers and motor carriers who are transporting cargo directly to or from a U.S. port.
- Require the motor carrier administration to temporarily allow 18-year-old drivers to receive a temporary commercial driver’s license for the transportation of cargo to or from a U.S. port or to assume the commercial operations of a truck driver who has been rerouted to a U.S. port.
- Require the Coast Guard and the Transportation Security Administration to jointly prioritize and expedite the consideration of Transportation Worker Identification Credential applications for those workers needed to provide direct assistance to a U.S. port.
- Require the Department of Homeland Security to provide temporary waivers of the Jones Act for vessels that are transporting cargo from a U.S. port to another U.S. port in order to relieve a port’s congestion, backlog or delay.
- Require the secretaries of agriculture, interior and transportation to jointly consult ocean carriers, ports, railroads and truckers to identify and designate plots of federal land that could temporarily be used for the storage and transfer of empty cargo containers in order to ease the congestion and backlog at U.S. ports.
- Require the secretary of defense to take an inventory of intermodal equipment (including truck chassis) and permit trucking companies to use such equipment as long as that use

does not affect national security and the truck company agrees to reimburse for any damage to the equipment.