

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

NOMINATION HEARING
DECEMBER 11, 2019

Written Questions Submitted to Thomas Chapman, Nominee to be a Member of the
National Transportation Safety Board

Submitted by Senator Peters

Question 1. What improvements or changes would you like to see at the NTSB?

Response: *In my view, the agency is facing at least three key challenges:*

- *Autonomous vehicles & new technology. Advances in automation and the development of autonomous vehicles hold great promise for enhancing transportation safety. However, these advances present new questions and challenges – some of which will be difficult to anticipate. NTSB must keep pace with the rapid changes. It must ensure that staff expertise is maintained and that appropriate tools and technical skills are available or developed to meet the challenge.*
- *Keeping pace with demand. NTSB’s reputation as the world’s premier transportation agency is well deserved. With such a reputation comes high expectations, and meeting those expectations in a timely fashion is ever more important. The resources available to the agency are limited and may become more so. NTSB has performed admirably in ensuring that resources are targeted effectively. Maintaining that discipline will remain essential.*
- *Maintaining & developing staff. NTSB staff are renowned for their skill and expertise. The work of the agency is highly dependent on the dedication and unique abilities of its employees. Recruiting and retaining skilled team members is a challenge for any government agency, and particularly for one such as NTSB which requires such unique skillsets. Key to success in this area is ensuring the well-regarded culture and work environment of the agency is maintained.*

If confirmed, I will work collaboratively with the Chairman, my fellow Board Members, and the staff of NTSB to ensure the limited resources available to the agency are targeted efficiently and appropriately to meet these challenges and to fulfill NTSB’s legislative mandate.

Question 2. We have examined in this Committee the many new entrants to our national airspace. What concerns do you have about emerging technologies and integration of an increasingly crowded national airspace?

Response: *I feel confident that emerging technologies such as drones can be safely integrated into our national airspace system. However, a key step in that process is promulgation by FAA of the so-called “Remote ID” rule. That initiative has lagged somewhat. FAA should be encouraged to move forward with the Remote ID rule as expeditiously as possible. Remote ID is essential to ensure the safe integration of drones. It will also play an important role in terms of security and deployment of effective counter drone measures.*

Question 3. Senator Young and I have introduced legislation to help reduce school bus related accidents—associated with children being hit by automobiles when getting on or off school buses. Are you familiar with this problem—and NTSB’s efforts to help address this issue? Do you have any thoughts on how NTSB can help address what the data indicates is a growing threat to school children?

Response: *We were reminded of the risks associated with school bus loading and unloading by two tragic accidents here in the Washington, D.C. region within the past week. I am certainly aware of the problem, and I know of NTSB’s work in this area. In fact, NTSB staff testified on the federal role in improving school bus safety at a House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee hearing last July.*

I commend your efforts to promote school bus safety, and I look forward to collaborating with you and Senator Young. If confirmed, I will work to support NTSB’s investigative and safety advocacy efforts in this area.

Question 4. Senator Ernst and I founded the Motorcycle Caucus in the Senate to advocate for and raise awareness about issues facing motorcycle riders and manufacturers. One of the biggest challenges for motorcyclists is being seen—a big part of which stems from driver awareness. Can you talk about your thoughts on the motorcycle safety and driver awareness in the context of the NTSB’s advocacy role?

Response: *I am aware that injuries and fatalities resulting from motorcycle accidents are a serious and growing problem. Further, I am personally familiar with the challenge of “being seen,” having been an avid bicyclist at an earlier time in my life. If confirmed, I am committed to working with fellow Board Members and NTSB staff to promote comprehensive solutions that address all facets of the problem.*

Question 5. Echoing Senator Cantwell's comments on grade crossings and pipeline safety—there are considerable safety challenges in these areas and so I would entreat you to follow up on your commitment to more fully examine these issues prior to and if you are confirmed by the Senate.

Response: *In responding to Senator Cantwell's question at the hearing, I did not mention an important connection to my own family history. My grandfather was killed in a grade crossing accident in the early 1950s, a few years before I was born. My mother was still in high school at the time. As you would expect, it was a defining experience in her life.*

I am less familiar with the challenges associated with pipeline safety. However, I have already engaged in the process of educating myself in this area. I also look forward to working with NTSB staff and current Board Members who have greater expertise regarding pipeline safety.

The commitment I made to Senator Cantwell is sincere and personal. I am happy to renew that commitment here. I am motivated to learn more about these issues and to do my very best to help address the critical safety challenges.