

Statement of Howard R. "Skip" Elliott
Nominee for Administrator of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
September 27, 2017
10:30 a.m.

Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, and Members of the Committee:

I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with many of the Committee members, and, if I am confirmed, I look forward to working with you to enhance safety in the transportation of hazardous materials and energy related products.

This morning I am pleased to introduce my wife, Jacqueline, my daughter Jessica and her husband Brendan, who is an active duty officer in the U.S. Coast Guard. I am also pleased to have here today my youngest granddaughter Elizabeth. My son Joshua and his family, who live in Pennsylvania, were not able to be with us today.

I am humbled that President Trump and Secretary Chao have asked me to lead the team of dedicated professionals in the Department's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration, known as PHMSA. I see this task as delivering safety enhancements that protect the public and the environment, while allowing for the uninterrupted, multi-modal transportation of energy products and other hazardous commodities that are necessary and essential to our daily lives. In addition to oil and chemicals for manufacturing, Americans depend on PHMSA for the safe transportation of a wide variety of everyday needs, including gasoline for their cars, natural gas to heat their homes, fertilizer for their gardens, cleaning solutions, and propane for their backyard barbeques.

My forty-year career in the U.S. railroad industry, much of it leading critical safety programs, has prepared me for this challenge. From 2004 until my retirement from CSX Transportation in Jacksonville, Florida, in March of this year, I served as Vice President of Public Safety, Health and Environment. In that role I led a highly-skilled team that was responsible for hazardous materials transportation safety, homeland security and railroad policing, environmental compliance and protection, crisis preparedness and response, and occupational health. I am a practitioner whose role and responsibilities required me to respond to many major hazardous materials incidents during my career. I have witnessed first-hand the severe impacts to the public and the environment these incidents can have.

This experience has led me to the belief that inspections and worker training are paramount in preventing accidents. In the same vein, I have worked tirelessly during my career to ensure that America's emergency first responders are trained and prepared to handle such events safely. I am especially proud of the innovative technology we developed and provided to state

emergency management and homeland security officials, starting more than 15 years ago. This technology has allowed these officials to track in near real-time CSX trains traversing their state and to quickly identify the commodities, hazardous and non-hazardous, the trains are transporting so they could be better prepared to respond to a security event or train emergency.

I am interested in exploring how technology can be deployed in other ways to enhance safety on pipelines and other forms of transportation. If confirmed, I would seek to encourage research and development efforts that will create and apply new and cutting-edge technology and automation to safety solutions.

Second, I would promote improvements in communications and outreach with all PHMSA stakeholders, ensuring regular, face-to-face interaction at all levels of government, industry, and the public.

Third, but not least, is to reinforce the necessity for quality and the sense of urgency of PHMSA's safety inspection mandates and to enhance the value and support the Agency provides to its partners at the state level.

As I close, I want to assure you of my absolute commitment to this role if confirmed. I began my railroad career as a railroad police officer working the midnight shift in Elkhart, Indiana. Never did I imagine I would end that career 40 years later as a Vice President of a major railroad company responsible for important public safety, security and environmental programs. Nor could I have envisioned sitting here today in front of an important Senate Committee as the President's nominee for PHMSA Administrator. I continue to believe in the value of hard work, perseverance when things get tough, never compromising my ethical values, and in being a compassionate and strong leader. I realize too how thankful I am to have a loving and understanding family and many wonderful friends and colleagues - some of whom are here today - who have helped and encouraged me along the way.

If confirmed, I will do my best to earn the confidence placed in me by the President, the Secretary, and by this Committee. Thank you.