

Opening Statement of Chairman John Thune
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Executive Session #1 – January 24, 2017

Good morning. Thanks to everyone for being here today for the first executive session of the 115th Congress. Today's session will serve as both our Committee's organizing meeting and a more traditional markup, where we will consider 16 legislative measures and two nominations.

Before we begin, I would like to again officially welcome the Committee's eight new Members. Senator Nelson will say a few words about our new colleagues on the Democratic side of the aisle, but it is my great pleasure to introduce the four new Republican members of the Committee, Senators Inhofe, Lee, Capito, and Young.

While Senator Inhofe is new to the Committee, he is not new to most of the issues within our jurisdiction. An avid pilot and a strong supporter of infrastructure, who was instrumental in the passage of both MAP 21 and the FAST Act, he will make strong contributions to our Committee work immediately.

Senator Lee is an accomplished practitioner of law and Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights. This work makes him very familiar with many of the issues we tackle here on the Committee, and he will be a great addition.

Senator Capito continues the strong tradition of West Virginians serving on this Committee. When I first became Ranking Member of the Committee, I had the pleasure to serve with Chairman Rockefeller, and last Congress Senator Manchin served on our Committee. I know the people of West Virginia will be well served by Senator Capito's addition to our Committee, and I'm especially glad to have another strong advocate for America's rural communities among our ranks.

Senator Young is yet another welcome addition, not only as a new Member of this Committee, but also of the Senate. He brings a strong work ethic and an accomplished resume in both the public and private sectors. A Marine for over a decade, we look forward to Senator Young bringing the fearlessness and tough-mindedness to the Committee that only a Marine can.

In addition to the new Committee members on our side of the aisle, we also have two new Subcommittee chairman. Senator Nelson will announce three ranking members today and continue working to finalize the final three shortly. The six subcommittees and their chairman are:

- Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security: Senator Blunt;
- Communications, Technology, Innovation and the Internet: Senator Wicker;
- Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security: Senator Moran
- Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard: Senator Sullivan
- Science, Space, and Competitiveness: Senator Cruz; and

- Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security: Senator Fischer.

As I mentioned at our first hearing, this Committee accomplished a great deal last Congress and I look forward to similar success this Congress. In particular, I see the Committee focusing on three main objectives.

First, it is time that we make common sense updates to our outdated communications law. We will begin this process today as we consider seven measures that seek to do just that. From Senator Nelson and my MOBILE NOW Act, which provides opportunities for broadband investment, to Senator Fischer and Booker's DIGIT Act, which encourages the deployment of the Internet of Things, the measures we are considering today are just the first of many telecommunication modernization efforts that this Committee will tackle this Congress.

Second, we will continue our efforts to improve our nation's infrastructure for all Americans, making it more secure, efficient, and safe. This will hopefully include an FAA reauthorization, a focus on aviation and surface security, promotion of the safe development of autonomous vehicles and other transportation technology, and working closely with the new Administration on their infrastructure plan.

Finally, we will continue our efforts to ensure our government leaders hold agencies accountable. We have already begun these efforts by considering the nominations of Secretary Elaine Chao and Mr. Wilbur Ross today. We will continue these efforts as we consider future nominees, through regular oversight, and through legislative measures that increase transparency and focus on results versus prescriptive solutions.

Turning to today's agenda, we will begin by approving our Committee rules. We are proposing no rule changes today. While I understand there may be some discussion about the merits of changing how we handle nominees' tax forms, I am pleased that we will continue this Committee's history of treating all nominees – be they Democrats or Republicans – the same.

We will also consider the Committee's budget for the 115th Congress, which the Rules Committee has directed us to do before January 31st. The proposed budget reflects the Rules Committee's requirements and the Joint Leadership agreement of January 5th on funding for committees. The budget provides funding for staff, equipment and supplies, and other Committee expenses during the 115th Congress. Senator Nelson and I believe the budget, which is basically unchanged from last Congress, is straightforward and we support the Committee's approval.

Next we will consider 16 legislative measures the Committee passed last Congress, either individually or as non-controversial parts of larger bills. Many of these agenda items also passed the Senate or House, but for a variety of reasons, were not enacted into law. In many respects, this is a "clean-up" agenda of unfinished business before we embark on a new slate of bills for the current Congress. We are hopeful that our quick consideration in Committee today will pave the way for their quick consideration in the Senate and hopeful enactment of these bills.

We will then consider the two nominations I've already mentioned: Secretary Chao for Secretary of Transportation and Mr. Wilber Ross for Secretary of Commerce. Both nominees are well qualified and will bring strong leadership to their respective Departments. I am hopeful that they will be considered by the full Senate quickly.

Finally, I would like to say a quick word about an item that we will consider at our next executive session, S. 118, the Reinforcing American-Made Products Act of 2017, sponsored by Senator Lee. The bill, which we had hoped to consider today, had some last minutes concerns raised. This measure was reported by the Committee by voice vote last Congress. It aims to incentivize more domestic manufacturing by applying the current, stringent federal standard for products labeled "Made in the USA" across the board. I appreciate Senator Lee's willingness to continue working with our Committee colleagues and affected stakeholders on this legislation. We are hopeful that, over the next few weeks, any issues can be resolved and the measure will receive strong support next time.

With that, I will now turn to Senator Nelson for any opening remarks.