

JRT Opening Statement

Confirmation Hearing

Amtrak – Joseph Gruters

NTSB – Jennifer Homendy

NHTSA – Heidi King

10:00 A.M., May 16, 2018

Good morning. We have three well-qualified nominees before the Committee today: Joseph Gruters, who has been nominated to the Amtrak Board of Directors; Jennifer Homendy, nominated to be a National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Member; and Heidi King, nominated to be the Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

Thank you to you and your families for your willingness to serve. If confirmed, each of you will have an opportunity to improve our nation's transportation system and bring your considerable expertise and leadership to your respective agencies.

Amtrak is the nation's principal inter-city passenger rail service. Recent Amtrak collisions and derailments have underscored the importance of implementing Positive Train Control (PTC) quickly, safely, and effectively. While the statutory deadline for PTC implementation is a little over seven months away, recent reports indicate that many railroads will be unable to fully meet this deadline. PTC implementation must be a priority for Amtrak and the freight and commuter railroads that operate over its infrastructure. As I've said before, railroads should not count on any extensions to the statutory framework Congress passed in 2015.

Mr. Gruters has been nominated to fill the eighth and final position on the Amtrak Board of Directors. He currently works as a Certified Public Accountant, and I believe his experience and qualifications will be an asset to the Board, if confirmed.

Jennifer Homendy is familiar to many of us here on the Committee, as she currently serves as the Democratic Staff Director on the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials on the U.S. House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, a position she has held for the past 14 years. Ms. Homendy's substantial experience in surface transportation will be valuable to the NTSB's efforts to investigate cases related to these modes.

Finally, Heidi King currently serves as the Acting Administrator of NHTSA, where she has worked since September 2017. Ms. King has substantial experience in both the public and private sector managing large organizations and prioritizing a data-driven approach to management.

Since taking on her role as Acting Administrator at NHTSA, she has demonstrated leadership and innovation in executing the agency's important mandate of improving highway safety, and I am pleased that she has been nominated to head this important agency. If confirmed, she will be responsible for overseeing numerous issues this Committee has grappled with in the past few years, ranging from the Takata airbag recall to policies governing the development and deployment of automated vehicles.

All of the nominees on today's agenda are well-qualified for their positions, and again, I will seek to confirm them as quickly as we can.

With that, I turn to Ranking Member Nelson for his opening statement.