

**Opening Statement for the Record of Rick A. Dearborn
Amtrak Board of Directors Nominee
U.S. Senate Commerce Committee
Thursday, July 26, 2018**

Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, Senator Wicker, and members of the Committee, it's a pleasure to be here testifying before you today. I'd also like to thank Senators Inhofe and Shelby for introducing me to the Committee this morning.

My name is Rick Dearborn and it is truly an honor to have been nominated by the President to serve on the Amtrak Board of Directors. As you know, I was raised and grew up in Oklahoma. However, I've had the pleasure to work on behalf of the people of Alabama for twenty years here in Washington, D.C. None of this would have been possible without the love and support of my wife, Gina, who is here with me today.

From an early age, I was fascinated with trains and railroads. For many years as a kid, my sisters and I used to spend several weeks every summer with my grandparents up near the Panhandle of Oklahoma, in Waynoka.

According to the *Waynoka Historical Society*, “Colonel Charles Lindbergh chose Waynoka, Oklahoma for the location of an airport on the Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT) air-rail route between New York and Los Angeles.

Starting in 1929, TAT offered 48-hour coast-to-coast passenger transport utilizing not only its own Ford Trimotor aircraft, but also the sleeper services of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Santa Fe Railroad for the two overnight segments of the long trip.

Waynoka was the point at which passengers transferred from the TAT plane to the Santa Fe train (going westbound), or from the Santa Fe train to the TAT plane (going eastbound). Amelia Earhart also came to Waynoka by the TAT...[today,] the BNSF main line from Chicago to the West Coast which passes the Waynoka depot is Oklahoma’s busiest rail line.”

Waynoka in those days had a population of around 1,200 to 1,500 folks, though it felt even smaller. My friends and I would ride our bikes and explore the 1,600 acres of sand dunes at the Little Sahara State Park and almost every day we would bike

down to the railroad tracks near the depot, waiting on the train to come down the tracks. The passengers were long gone, but the Santa Fe still came through a few times a day.

We would race down to those tracks, place pennies on them to get flattened by the wheels of the train and wait for the conductor to toss down small cartons of the coldest milk you ever drank off the back of the caboose. We would all then race back home in time for supper. It was truly an idyllic place and a great way to grow up in a rural state.

Later in my life, I got a college job loading cars onto railroad cars as a Teamster at the Oklahoma City Chevrolet plant. We loaded Celebrities and Citations on seven tracks of rail in 100-degree heat and it was the hardest job I ever had. Later, I moved into the car plant as a member of the UAW union working on the Assembly line.

Growing up I collected toy trains with my Dad. For the past thirty years I've collected and operated O gauge model toy trains. By all accounts I have amassed a sizable model train collection of nearly 75 locomotives and well over 300 rolling stock. I am a

current member of the Train Collector's Association and have been since 1999.

In the past, I built my own thirty-foot by sixteen-foot platform, a full wiring system and control panel and multiple running lines of operation. I remain hopeful in the months to come I can build out another platform in my small single car garage here in our Virginia home.

Professionally, I am currently a consultant providing my corporate clients with strategic guidance. Most recently, I served on the Trump transition team and in the Trump Administration for 15 months. However, the United States Senate is where I served the bulk of my career.

For more than 20 years, I proudly served as a staffer in various roles for this institution's Members. I served as a Legislative Director for then-Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama, later having served for over twelve years as his Chief of Staff.

During that time, he served on the EPW Committee and the Transportation Subcommittee. We worked on various surface

transportation reauthorization bills, from ISTEA through the FAST Act. Passenger rail issues were part of our yearly routine. Our office worked rail issues on behalf of our constituents and our country. Though Amtrak wasn't rolled into the larger transportation bill until the FAST Act of 2015, passenger rail issues were something we dealt with annually, as did most rural state offices with long distance routes.

I have also been an avid rider on our Nation's railways. I have travelled the Northeast Corridor between Washington, D.C. and New York many times, and a few trips to Philly, Boston, and south to Roanoke. I've also had the chance to take the *Cardinal* into West Virginia.

If confirmed to the Amtrak Board, I will conduct myself as a responsible steward of the American public's investment in our passenger rail system.

I will have a direct responsibility to monitor the executive leadership's financial, management and operational decisions, staying up to date on the best practices relating to all management

and accounting standards throughout the rail industry. I would work to incorporate those best practices standards during my term.

If confirmed, a high priority of mine would be paying particular focus on the Positive Train Control (PTC) system and learn more about the Safety Management System (SMS) that the new Leadership team has recently initiated. I also realize the Board plays a key role in hiring the right executives and reviewing their performance.

If confirmed, I would concentrate on the key priorities I believe Amtrak must focus on to be successful and remain a vibrant mode of transportation throughout the nation: the safety of its passengers; increasing its ridership as a competitive, convenient, clean and comfortable mode of transportation; and the need to make smart capital investments in existing infrastructure and the reduction and ultimate elimination of Amtrak's debt.

Amtrak's focus on safety must be its top priority. Its record must improve. I was encouraged by Amtrak's recent hire of a new Executive Vice President of Safety reporting directly to the CEO. Amtrak's goal is to be in full compliance with PTC requirements,

conditions and schedules set or administered by the FRA by the year-end deadline.

As for success through increasing its ridership – Amtrak should provide a service that people want to utilize. It needs to be on-time, it needs to be clean and it needs to be a competitive option for all travelers with other transportation modes.

There are a lot of growth opportunities in short distance corridors where Amtrak can work with their state partners to evaluate ridership and interest.

Finally, smart capital investment is needed. Investment in aging infrastructure, some of which dates back to the Civil War era. Investment in new rolling stock for both the NEC and the National Network.

I want to thank the President for nominating me. I am excited about the future of passenger rail in our country. If confirmed, I would be committed to working with my colleagues on the Board, the management of the company, the Administration, and

Congress to ensure Amtrak is managed as safely, efficiently, and responsibly as possible.

Thank you for your consideration of my nomination and I look forward to your questions.