

Statement of Robert E. Primus

Nominee to become a Member of the Surface Transportation Board

Before the

United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

August 6, 2020

Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for affording me the opportunity to appear before you today in consideration of my nomination to serve on the Surface Transportation Board.

There are several people responsible for my success who, due to the pandemic, could not be present with me this morning, and I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to acknowledge them. I would like to acknowledge my amazing wife Gladys for her love and unwavering support; my three energetic and train-loving sons Benjamin, Jacob and Aaron Francis; my mother Betty Primus, my sister Marcene and her family and my brother Michael. I would also like to acknowledge the influence and support of my late father, William Primus. Lastly, I want to thank my friend, teacher and mentor, former Congressman Mike Capuano, for giving me the opportunity to serve as his Chief of Staff for eighteen of the twenty years he served in Congress.

My desire to join the Surface Transportation Board is borne from the idea that I want to continue my career in public service assisting in the oversight of an industry that is of great interest to me and significant importance to the nation. My appreciation for our nation's rail system began when I was a child, surrounded by family members who worked for railroads, and has culminated during my time with Congressman Capuano when he served as the Ranking Member on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials. During that time, I was afforded the opportunity to work directly with the various sectors of the rail community and gained a more complete understanding of the legislative and regulatory policies that govern our national rail network.

The Surface Transportation Board plays a critical role in ensuring our nation's rail network is sound and functioning properly. This Committee specifically, and the Congress as a whole, recognized the Board's importance through the passage of the Surface Transportation Board Reauthorization Act of 2015. Through the legislation, this Committee strengthened the authority of the Board to oversee, investigate and adjudicate matters that have long been a concern to industry stakeholders and Congress alike. Paramount among these concerns is the need to address deficiencies associated with the rate case process. Chairman Ann Begeman, along with Board Members Patrick Fuchs and Marty Oberman have since made considerable strides to address the issue. I look forward to working with them to implement changes that, consistent with sound economic principles, will streamline the rate case process to substantially

reduce costs and timelines and ultimately enhance the Board's effectiveness in handling such cases.

Another area of interest is the attention the Board gives to the smaller and mid-sized shippers and the Class II and III railroads that provide vital services to our nation's small towns and rural communities. During my time in Congress, I made sure that the concerns of constituents who did not have the ability or resources to navigate the Congressional and federal process were appropriately heard. If confirmed, it would be a priority to ensure that the voices of the small shipper and small regional and shortline railroads are amplified and that their issues continue to occupy a place of importance among the Board.

I also plan to value and amplify the importance of our nation's passenger rail service. As someone who grew up riding trains and continues to do so when visiting relatives in the South, I am acutely aware of the importance of passenger rail service to the national rail network and in particular, the many rural communities that rely on it. I applaud the Committee's efforts to address issues related to passenger rail service. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the other Board Members on issues that are of concern to the passenger rail community and within the jurisdiction of the Board.

In closing, I have sought, over my nearly twenty-five years of public service, to build a reputation centered on objectivity and fairmindedness, which in turn has allowed me to become a strong consensus builder and problem solver. I hope to bring my background, solving complex and multi-dimensional problems, into a regulatory environment where I believe an unbiased, thoughtful and unconventional approach and perspective will lead to fresh ideas and ultimately solutions to some of the challenges the Board is tasked to address and resolve.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to come before you this morning and I look forward to answering any questions.