



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, & TRANSPORTATION

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell

**Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Executive Session**

Wednesday, December 7, 2022

Opening Statement

[VIDEO](#)

CANTWELL: This morning we will be considering several nominees to fill positions at the Amtrak Board of Directors, the Surface Transportation Board, the [Corporation] for Public Broadcasting, the Marine Mammal Commission and Coast Guard promotions.

First, we'll consider five nominations to the Amtrak Board of Directors, each of whom will bring a strong expertise to Amtrak governance. Amtrak is essential in its transportation for both our rural and urban communities across the nation.

In the state of Washington, Amtrak's long-distance services 15 communities such as Wenatchee, Pasco and Centralia, and many others and are key to our transportation alternatives. Washington is a significant beneficiary of these routes with 43 percent of the Empire Builder riders and 50 percent of Coast Starlight riders getting on or off at stations in Washington or stations in Portland, Oregon. Thankfully, every single Amtrak board member we are considering today has committed to continuing and supporting Amtrak's long-distance service.

At the hearings, we pressed for the need to aim for Amtrak to improve its hiring to get all routes operating at pre-pandemic levels. After pressing the nominees and Amtrak, they have made progress. The company has hired 404 employees in October, up 33 percent from the monthly hiring average of last fiscal year. Importantly to Washington state, Amtrak hired the crew members to restart one of the Cascades roundtrip services to Vancouver, British Columbia, that has been shut down for far too long. However, more needs to be done, which is why I secured commitments from every one of the Amtrak nominees to hold Amtrak accountable for executing their workforce development plan.

Next, we will consider Robert Primus to be a member of the Surface Transportation Board. The Surface Transportation Board provides a critical role in overseeing the freight rail industry, which is currently struggling with ongoing nationwide service issues, and Mr. Primus has held the industry to account. For instance, next week the board is holding a hearing on Union Pacific's skyrocketing use of freight embargoes which have increased over 3,000 percent since 2017. This practice of rejecting rail shipments because their networks are too congested -- in part due to workforce shortages --

deserves close and continued scrutiny. I am supporting Mr. Primus because I am confident he will continue to work to ensure the United States has a rail network that is able to efficiently move our nation's goods.

Next, we will consider Rubydee Calvert and Diane Kaplan to be members of the Board of Directors of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Ms. Calvert, first appointed in 2018, currently serves as the vice chair of the CPB Board of Directors. And she previously served as the General Manager for the Wyoming Public Broadcasting Service, a member of the National Public Broadcasting Service Board and a member of the Board of Directors of America's Public Television Stations. Ms. Kaplan formerly served as president and CEO of Rasmusen Foundation and CEO of Alaska's Public Radio Network. Ms. Calvert and Ms. Kaplan will work with their fellow board members to further... [Corporation] for Public Broadcasting's mission and providing universal access to commercial high-quality content on our airwaves.

We will also be considering the nomination of Dr. Sue Moore [and] Dr. Andrew Read to be commissioners of the Marine Mammal Commission. Dr. Read is a professor of marine biology at Duke and director of Duke's marine laboratory, and he is a leading scientist who studied marine mammals, seabirds and sea turtles and has published more than 200 peer reviewed publications. Dr. Moore is a research scientist based in Seattle, currently serving on the Marine Mammal Commission's Committee of Scientific Advisors. As an affiliate professor for the Department of Biology at the University of Washington, Dr. Moore has 40 years of research experience on whales in the Pacific waters and the Arctic. She has spent 20 of those years serving in various positions at NOAA and previously served on the working group of the International Whaling Commission. It is clear the Commission will greatly benefit from both Dr. Read's and Dr. Moore's years of experience and work to conserve the world's marine mammal population.

Finally, we will be considering 288 Coast Guard promotions. These US Coast Guard commanders, captains, rear admirals will fill important posts across the Coast Guard. I want to recognize two of our former fellows, soon-to-be commanders, Michelle Rosenberg and Eric Vryheid. Michelle made contributions to this Committee and to the Coast Guard, including the ballast water reform legislation to improve vessel traffic management and policies to support Coast Guard families. And Eric helped to usher in the Coast Guard's first woman Commandant and worked tirelessly over the last year on our Coast Guard legislation.

Before I turn things over to my colleague, Ranking Member Wicker, I'd also like to at this moment, just in case we don't get another chance, recognize Senator Blunt for his service to this Committee and to the Senate. Senator Blunt, you have left an indelible mark on this Committee -- for several reasons. Most visibly, this beautiful Committee room, and it's been restored to the aesthetic and equipment that is...you have the historic aesthetic, but the modern equipment that has made this dais probably the best dais in the Senate today. To commemorate your work, we are working on installing a plaque so that members of visitors in this room will know that you led the charge in

restoring the grandeur of a 1908 room, while making it functional for the 21st century. So we thank you for that.

But it has been a privilege to work with you on a number of important legislative efforts, including as the Aviation Subcommittee [Chair] and your efforts on making sure that we make progress for the American people, including the CHIPS and Science Act and the Air Grant program, which will hopefully be fully funded to usher into the Capitol and Executive Branch a new generation of technical experts to help us on safe aviation policy decisions in the future. And you've been a great champion for Manufacturing USA, which I greatly appreciate your work, and including that as part of the CHIPS and Science bill.

So now I'd like to turn it over to Ranking Member Wicker, who I have to say I'm very sad to say that you are moving over to the Armed Services Committee. I'm very proud of what we have accomplished together for our nation, including aviation safety legislation, the COVID-19 package for transportation workers, and important must-pass legislation during the pandemic to prevent fraud scams, the Surface Transportation Investment Act, which was a major, major accomplishment by this Committee, the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill and many of the major issues for Amtrak.

I know you'll remain a member of this Committee and you and I will remain committed to getting a gulf rail service that will finally return this service to an important part of your community. It was no small feat to pass the Pipes Act of 2020 to improve the safety of natural gas pipelines across this country. And I'm very, very proud you and I work together on the CHIPS and Science bill.

We still have a lot to do and finishing the USICA Conference, and Spectrum for the FCC, the Coast Guard Authorization bill, which is moving through our process, but I can't say enough about the working relationship and accomplishments of what we've been able to do together. So thank you for that.