

Statement of Senator Tom Carper
Commerce Committee
June 8, 2006

I have the privilege of introducing a native Delawarean and the son of Delaware's senior senator to the Committee today as a nominee to the Amtrak Board of Directors. This is a pleasure for several reasons.

First, Hunter will be an excellent addition to the Amtrak Board. He is a graduate of Georgetown and Yale. He has served as senior vice president at MBNA America and as executive director of e-commerce policy coordination at the U.S. Department of Commerce. And, five years ago, he founded a law firm here in D.C. that now represents over 100 clients, mostly nonprofit organizations and educational institutions.

But more significantly, Hunter has spent a lot of time on Amtrak trains. Like his father, Rep. Mike Castle and myself, Hunter Biden has lived in Delaware while using Amtrak to commute to his job in Washington, D.C. You learn a lot about what works and what could work better at Amtrak by riding those trains. You also see the huge economic benefit that a region receives from having a strong passenger rail corridor – something that should be available in more of the country.

The second reason I am pleased to see this nomination move forward is that it shows we are moving in a bipartisan direction. The Amtrak Board has traditionally had both Democrat and Republican members, but for the past few years it has been both partisan and incomplete. Last November when 93 members of the Senate supported the Amtrak reauthorization bill introduced by Sen. Lott and Sen. Lautenberg – and cosponsored by myself and many of the members of this Committee – we saw that Amtrak has strong bipartisan support. Passenger rail, like highways and airports, is not a partisan issue. It is a mode of travel gaining popularity at a time when commuters and travelers are being pinched by high gas prices and frustrated with highway and airport congestion.

Finally, as we confirm a full, bipartisan Board, that Board will be more able to take on the difficult issues facing Amtrak – from tackling long-deferred maintenance, modernizing the system nationwide and addressing demand for new and expanded service across the country on already stretched freight tracks. A full bipartisan Board that has been duly confirmed by this Senate will have the credibility needed to take on these challenges and move Amtrak into the 21st century.

And while we are tackling these challenges, it will be comforting for the millions of Amtrak riders and commuters to know that one of their own will be on the Board of Directors.