Press Release

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RWU Urges Senate Rejection of Ron Batory to Amtrak Board

Railroad Workers United (RWU) expresses serious concerns following the White House’s recent announcement nominating Ron Batory to the Amtrak Board of Directors, a decision that appears influenced by political maneuvers rather than a commitment to rail safety, labor interests, or Amtrak itself.

Ron Batory’s tenure as the Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) was marked by policies favoring “operational efficiencies” (i.e., corporate profits) over the safety and well-being of rail workers and the public. Notably, under his leadership, FRA attempted to override state laws mandating two-person train crews, promoting instead the adoption of single-person crews nationally. This push was part of a broader deregulation agenda, ostensibly aimed at reducing operational costs for the monopoly of carriers at the potential expense of safety and labor protections.

Moreover, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Batory oversaw the FRA’s issuance of emergency waivers that suspended numerous long-standing safety regulations. These waivers were granted rapidly with limited opportunity for stakeholder input, raising significant concerns among rail labor organizations about their sweeping breadth and the lack of stringent oversight, which could compromise rail safety and worker security.

During a congressional hearing on the state of the rail labor workforce, Mr. Batory's indifference to safety concerns was starkly evident. When asked about the practicality of single-person crews managing faults in long trains, his response highlighted the impracticality and safety risks involved. "If he's a good walker," he remarked, it could take an hour to walk to the rear of a three-mile-long train to identify and repair a problem, and another hour to return. This flippant disregard for the logistical and safety challenges posed by such a policy starkly contrasts with the urgent needs of emergency responders who may be obstructed by such operational inefficiencies.
His tenure also saw him asserting, without data support, that one-person crews were no less safe than two-person crews, a claim that undermines established safety protocols and the collective experience of the rail labor community.

It is imperative that nominees for the Amtrak Board of Directors demonstrate a historical commitment to supporting Amtrak’s mission to enhance and expand a robust passenger train network for the American public. Those who have managed private Class One railroads, entities that have consistently impeded Amtrak’s efforts for over fifty years, should not be considered for these critical roles. Their past actions reveal a conflict of interest that could hinder the progress and innovation necessary to meet the nation's transportation needs.

Given this background, RWU urges all members of Rail Labor to actively contact their Senators and argue against Mr. Batory’s confirmation. His record clearly demonstrates a prioritization of carrier profits over the safety of rail workers and the traveling public.

While some may argue that the Biden administration is procedurally obligated to forward this nomination, RWU contends that it starkly contradicts the administration's stated commitments to worker safety and robust regulatory standards. The nomination of Mr. Batory, whose regulatory philosophy aligns with reducing workforce protections and operational oversight, does not serve the public interest.

Our stance is not just about opposing Mr. Batory’s nomination; it is about advocating for a reimagined Amtrak Board of Directors. The Board needs advocates for safety, not deregulation, representing diverse stakeholders committed to enhancing nationwide passenger rail services. The current nomination process overlooks the necessity for balance on the Board, instead favoring individuals with a history of prioritizing corporate interests.

Furthermore, RWU holds Republican leaders accountable for not addressing why someone with Mr. Batory’s controversial record is considered suitable for the Amtrak Board. Their lack of transparency and justification in this nomination process warrants scrutiny and public accountability.

Regardless of the nomination’s outcome, RWU is resolved to maintain our advocacy for an equitable, pro-passenger rail expansion, and safety-focused Amtrak Board. We stand ready to assert that, should his past actions be indicative of his future performance, we will have reaffirmed our commitment to rail safety and labor rights, proudly stating, "We told you so."