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Dear Chairman Oberman -

I appreciate the STB looking into the current state of the rail industry.

I have been a part of this life for nine years now as a spouse to an engineer who was proud to be a career railroader. Outside of being a spouse, I am a CPA who is a Director of Finance and HR. I spend countless hours working on how to retain and attract the best staff. The latest round of attendance policies being implemented at all of the Class I railroads (specifically during a pandemic when the crews were deemed essential staff) is appalling. I would go as far to say it is a thinly veiled attempt at fostering a toxic and hostile work environment.

After serving six years in the USAF, with multiple tours in Iraq, my spouse sought out an opportunity that would still allow him to have an impact serving Americans. He quickly hired on at a Class I railroad and progressed from conductor to engineer. He has now been with that railroad for 15 years.

Starting out working for the railroad, he knew there were great opportunities. Though he was furloughed once for 18 months, it was worth sticking it out, because he knew that eventually he was going to be able to hold a position such as the Utility Man. He knew from the seasoned engineers that sticking with the railroad was going to provide a career that would allow him to provide for his future family and may even be able to allow his wife to stay home.

During his time, the Class I railroads have continued to make what get deemed as "minor" changes which has no longer made the railroad the proud career that it was. I would compare this to them kicking a can down the road and seeing how far they can go. When he started there were multiple jobs in the yard and freight was able to be moved quickly and efficiently. In the last five years, the yard jobs have been cut to the barebones. Industries aren't getting their cars switched because there is simply a lack of manpower to do it. You do not have to be a management expert to know that when you cut 30% of your staffing, but do not decrease the workload that customer service will slip. That slippage is what is bringing all of these concerns to light today.

From my perspective, what will it take for someone to step in and regulate what the Class I railroads are doing by slashing staff and causing a national supply chain crisis that predates Covid if everything they do is "minor"? Because for Class I railroads to fall back on it being crew shortages causing the issues, they have literally caused that problem for themselves. While the rest of the literal world is fighting for new hires and trying their best to retain staffing by offering flexible work schedules, compensation increases, and better benefits, the Class I railroads have decided to double down and take a punishment approach to penalize workers for not being available 90% of their time. If I were to have a crystal ball, which I don't, I just have logic - this is all the long game for these same railroads to come back to the STB very soon begging for permission for one man crews to again slash American workers' jobs. When we can no longer find bread on the shelves, fuel for our cars, and inflation is pushing more and

more Americans into poverty because the materials needed to keep our economy moving are being delayed by a self-manufactured crisis.

On a personal level, pre-pandemic, I had an evening where my infant daughter was very sick - her breathing was terrible. I left a voicemail for my husband that I was taking my daughter to the ER. On a break, he listened to the voicemail and went to the trainmaster that he needed to leave. He met me at the ER. Two weeks later we received a certified letter that he was going to investigation because he left mid shift to join me at the hospital. The trainmaster and terminal manager were more concerned about how he found out that she was at the ER, than that a baby was being taken to the ER because she could not breathe. At one point the trainmaster even listened to our baby's labored breathing before she left him leave. When staffing is so low with PSR, there is no elasticity in the system for when human emergencies occur and emergencies will always be there.

In my world, making "policy" changes that affect your work force like these extremely punitive attendance policies would have been negotiated with the Union. Although I agree that technology can help with efficiency, it isn't going to replace the experience the crews have. You pay for expertise and that expertise is how you generate your revenue. I can't fathom having any office/corporate worker from any of the Class I's live a rail crew's schedule for 30 days. It takes a special person to make this a career.

In conclusion, he and I know that the railroad can do better. He is now three years out without a contract and there isn't one in sight since the Class I railroads will spend years in arbitration. When hired on he agreed to be available 75% of the time and now they want 90%. The railroads are not a fair market. They do not have to follow the same struggles as most corporations. They have captive customers, but when service to those customers declines, it affects the entire economy. I suggest the STB not brush all these issues to the side, it is time for Congress and the STB to step in and take all regulatory actions necessary to get the railroads properly staffed and shipments delivered on-time. I believe that there are three things that need to be addressed immediately:

- The Railroad Labor Act is outdated and the definition of minor and major need to be addressed. If the Unions had the power to threaten a strike - attendance policies and loss of American jobs would not be where we are today.
- Punitive attendance policies are creating unsafe working conditions with fatigued and sick crews.
- National contract negotiations should be expedited and have time limits. Policies, such as the punitive attendance policies, that clearly affect Union members should have to go through negotiation

Thank you for your time.

Vanessa Mason