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February 7, 2006

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I have today submitted online, for your consideration, my application for a position on the Board of Directors of Amtrak. It is my understanding that there are currently three vacancies on the Board. I believe I could serve you, Amtrak, and our country quite well by occupying one of them. Though my qualifications are unconventional, I believe I could be an extraordinarily important asset to the railroad and your administration. I have traveled 150,000 miles on Amtrak. I spend two hours each day on its trains.

Like your recently confirmed Supreme Court nominee, Justice Samuel Alito, I, too, attended Princeton some many years ago in the overlap years with Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, though I did not know him personally at that time. I'm sure, though, that we passed many times on the campus walkways. Like Mr. Frist, I went on to an Ivy League medical school. And we both have detoured since then – he to politics, and I to the frontiers of computing. I've finally come around to seeing the logic of Mr. Frist's choice, and I wish to serve.

Many years ago, as the president of the Teenage Republicans of Guernsey County, Ohio, on the eve of Richard Nixon's re-election, I had an avid interest in politics, but it waned after the debacle of Watergate. I became disaffected with public discourse and chose to register with no party affiliation at all when I moved to Pennsylvania in 1998. Then, in August of last year, Amtrak "happened" to me in a most unusual and extraordinary way that brought me back into the politics of transportation and public policy with a new hope and fervor.

In August, 2005, Amtrak was secretly planning on closing my small Northeast Corridor commuting station serving Pennsylvanians who work in New York City, just an hour's ride away by Amtrak train. No government agencies outside Amtrak had been informed of its imminent closure, but the train conductors warned me it was about to happen, so I forced Amtrak to publicly reveal its plans, worked with my excellent, inspirational freshman Republican congressman, Michael Fitzpatrick, to try to save the station, met with Amtrak's then-president David Gunn in Washington, and did in fact save the station from closure.

It wasn't a matter of pork barrel politics, either. Amtrak had simply made every mistake in the book in the operation and promotion of the station – including never putting up an

Amtrak sign there or on any of the highway approaches, not supplying any printed schedules to the station, and failing to tell the station manager (who worked for SEPTA, the regional transit agency) when the trains were scheduled to come and go. When the manager of a Northeast Corridor Amtrak station can't even tell you how many Amtrak trains stop at the station, let alone what times they show up or where the southbound ones go, you know something is very, very wrong with the railroad. We were the most lost, most forgotten station on the Northeast Corridor. For that matter, we still are. The only Amtrak signs at the station today are the ones I personally make, laminate, and post myself. Until three weeks ago, the only way the station got schedules was by my taking them out of the racks at Penn Station in New York and handing them to the station manager when I got home.

Early in September, while I was in the midst of saving the station, Amtrak launched a second attack on us. Under the false cover of fuel price increases in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (arguably causing not more than a 2% increase in Amtrak's total budget), Amtrak gave 11 days' notice to its 2,000 monthly pass commuters – people who use Amtrak to ride back and forth to their jobs every day – that their commuting costs were to increase by nearly 70% (to \$1,008 per month in the case of Philadelphians). For most of the roughly 800 Philadelphia-area commuters who depended on Amtrak to get to their New York City jobs, that increase plus those of the preceding few months of 2005 was equivalent to handing them a \$9,373 year-to-year salary cut with less than two weeks to figure out how to deal with it. The day I met with David Gunn at my congressman's office in Washington, he wisely put the increase on hold for further consideration. A week later, the Amtrak Board of Directors met, and the increase was re-instituted, but disguised in two steps, the first half in October, and the final half of the increase scheduled to hit this month on the 16th. A few weeks later, the Board fired Mr. Gunn as well.

My own investigation into the reason for the increase has revealed, I believe, that it was done for political reasons without regard to its impact on the most vulnerable, most dependent riders on Amtrak's system, the daily job commuters who accounted for only about one half of one percent of the railroad's income. America needs a more honest railroad, one that does not habitually operate by deception and that does, indeed, take into account its moral obligations and social effects. Those who are last should be first. As the fellow riders from my station change jobs, move to New Jersey, buy gas and new cars and drive out of state to Trenton for the NJ Transit rail alternative, and find other creative ways to abandon the Amtrak system, I expect to see fewer than half of the old riders on the trains a year from now. Once upon a time, the federal government regulated the railroads to prevent this sort of monopolistic abuse of the common citizen. Now that the government has the monopoly, the abuse is back.

As of February 16th, the “discounted” rate Amtrak will charge Philadelphians commuting to their jobs in New York, 91 miles away, will be about 32 cents a mile, as high as or higher than the cost of driving, and higher than virtually any “full fare” ride anywhere west of the Mississippi or even anywhere outside the Northeast Corridor in the eastern U.S. The most comparable Amtrak commuter route outside the Northeast Corridor that I

can find, with respect to frequency of service and distance of travel, is the route from Oakland, California, to the state capitol in Sacramento. The fare for monthly passes there is about 11 cents a mile. Amtrak's fare increase is breaking the Northeast *Job* Corridor apart without even yet privatizing a mile of track or selling off a single piece of rolling stock. I am trying to stop the damage and prevent the February fare increase as best I know how.

A month ago, I sent each of the members of Amtrak's Board of Directors 35 pages of documentation demonstrating that the fare increase Amtrak was implementing was most likely going to gain them nothing in revenue (or actually result in a revenue loss) and cause a lot of personal pain to those people who once trusted the railroad with their careers in a distant city. I asked to speak to each of them to represent the plight of Amtrak's commuters, offering to meet with them at their personal convenience any time, anywhere in the country. None have responded at all.

I called the office of Mr. Jeffrey Rosen, the Transportation Department's designated representative at the Board meetings, but I have not yet been allowed to speak with him. He has designated a department lawyer, Terence Carlson, to speak with me instead. Mr. Carlson tried to brush me off on Mr. Rosen's behalf, but I in turn asked for an audience with the entire Board and a statement of policy towards Amtrak's legacy commuters. No policy has been communicated to me, nor to my fellow riders. Furthermore, no offer to speak to any or all Board members has been tendered through his office. But Mr. Carlson did relay a question from Mr. Rosen to me as to whether I had had any success at contacting Mr. Laney, the Chairman of the Board. I have spoken twice with Mr. Laney's secretary, quite the Yellow Rose, at his Dallas law office, and at last report there are "no openings" in Mr. Laney's schedule and no word on when any might appear. In other words, the entire Amtrak Board of Directors is stonewalling me over this critical human policy issue at this time.

As a result of all my self-initiated lobbying work with Amtrak, I have become quite conversant with rail and transportation issues in general, and Amtrak issues in particular. I now have a considerable library of rail-related books which I am using to educate myself on the complexities of railroad operation, funding, and public policy. Through the Internet and in person I have met with and heard from dozens of people both within and without Amtrak, and heard their concerns. Among passengers I have been treated at times a bit like Robin Hood on rails since the station save in September, and many have come to me with their concerns about their jobs and their ability to continue to hold them despite the coming fare increase. Some of the e-mail I now receive appears to be laundered cries for help from inside the company. As recently as this past week, I was slipped a note from someone who has nothing to do with Amtrak at all except that he wants me to know that the power generation equipment in Pennsylvania is from the WPA era, falling into disrepair, and in danger of failing the Corridor. Either a little bird told him or someone inside Amtrak thinks I have the power to make a difference.

Since the save of the station in September, I have traveled on my own nickel to Washington again to speak with concerned staff members on Capitol Hill and elsewhere

in the city, including at Amtrak's Union Station headquarters itself. (I have spent, by the way, several thousand dollars on my Amtrak efforts to date, and I consider it money very well spent.) I created and still run the website www.savecornwellsheights.com to save the station first from closure and second from the draconian fare increase that is driving away the riders. And I now also run a more upbeat site called www.understandingamtrak.com where I hope to make the good side of Amtrak service more visible and understandable to the general public. It is still in the early stages of its development and growth.

I have done a tremendous amount of research on U.S. rail as well as comparable systems abroad. I am convinced that Amtrak suffers from a severe case of Washington Union Station-itis and could most likely be very significantly improved if a voice on the Board of Directors came from the land of the trains outside Washington. Amtrak's management is virtually clueless about the dynamics of its own Northeast Corridor ridership. They understand the trains, perhaps, but not the people who ride them. If Amtrak can literally lose all track of my station situated just one hour outside of Manhattan, running trains through it like ships in the night, I can only cringe to guess how badly served the rest of the country may be. Does this mean that Amtrak should be dashed against the rocks of bankruptcy and destroyed? Is it beyond hope of reform? Can it be built back up in a sensible way? I don't know the answers to these questions yet, but I would like to do my best for my country to help find the answers. By the end of your presidency, Mr. Bush, one way or another, I think we can turn things around.

Before nominating me for the Amtrak Board, if you would do me that honor, you should know much more about me and about my qualifications. Intellectually, I am an unusual creature. I am self-taught in my chosen field of computing, yet have produced two books on Amazon, the first of which is used by Intel Corporation (last time I checked, anyhow) as the style and content model for its book publishing division even though that particular book, my first, was published elsewhere. The other one I wrote some chapters for at Intel's request to explain how to get top performance out of their most advanced, most complex computer processor. I'm considered an expert and innovator in the field of computer software performance optimization – able to juggle thousands of balls (lines of code) in my head to figure out how to make the best systems possible. I believe there is considerable carryover between this unusual capability of mine and what it takes to understand and help the railroads.

In addition to understanding computing and the information industries rather well, I have a solid grounding in the sciences all the way from graduate quantum mechanics to molecular biology and medicine, with a lot of the fundamentals of good engineering thrown in between. I aced economics, too. I believe I actually have a good shot at comprehending Amtrak's difficulties and finding good creative solutions to at least some of them. If I were just interested in battling the February fare increase, I would not be asking you to nominate me to the Amtrak Board of Directors. I have many other very positive, creative thoughts I would like to bring to the table. I would like to use the experience of further learning the ropes of Amtrak to affect government policies toward rail and other transportation systems for the better. I would like to think that with some

more hard work, I might make Secretary of Transportation someday in a future administration.

So that you may better understand what I may bring to the Board, I am sending you not only my résumé, but a statement of the “platform” of ideas on which I am running for your vote. If I get that vote, I will happily seek bipartisan Senate confirmation. As I am sure you know, two of the four current sitting Board members, Messrs. Hall and Sosa, had no background at all in rail or transportation before being nominated by you for the Board, and neither has stood for or received confirmation by the Senate. Indeed, I have searched the Internet to try to find any indication at all as to what they think or what they do on the Board, but I believe neither one has spoken a substantive word on the record about rail issues – at least as far as I can find. The other two active Board members are lawyers, only one of whom – Mr. Laney – has received Senate confirmation. Adding me to the Board with Senate confirmation would serve to add to the Board’s legitimacy, a matter which has been called into question in recent months.

When I saved my station, Amtrak gave me two new trains to replace trains they had already scheduled for cancellation. One comes up to my station from Washington, and the other returns there. Those are the trains I now ride to and from work each day. As a result, I can easily participate in Washington meetings and affairs from time to time while keeping my “day job.” I can certainly make it to Board meetings and will gladly show up when Congress or its subcommittees ask for my testimony. (It was not clear why Messrs. Hall and Sosa chose not to attend the David Gunn firing hearings before the House Rail Subcommittee in November, but had I been on the Board, I would have made every effort to be there.)

For the past six months, I have dedicated an average of at least 20 hours a week – and sometimes more than 100 – to studying and working on Amtrak issues. That is already more, I believe, than would normally be expected from a member of the Board. I now know, for instance, that the freight railroads of America can actually make a profit by charging two and a half cents to move a ton of goods one mile, and that on straight descending track, a train could theoretically roll from Denver to Los Angeles (a 1-mile drop in altitude) without an engine – zero energy cost when dropping five feet in a mile, the great hope of steel on steel. I also know that the formula for passenger rail, which must run at higher speeds and with more frequent stops, is different, but I honestly don’t believe it has to cost 32 cents a mile to carry a commuter on the Northeast Corridor. They should be carried on margin, and historically *were* carried on margin until someone quite recently started playing politics in Washington with their tickets and with their lives. I’ll be looking for ways to make the economics and the train system work well together in the public interest. I realize that members of the Board of Directors are not normally expected to inject themselves into the details of company management and oversight at this level, but I would hope that with your backing I will be allowed to do so.

By way of broadening the picture of my governmental interests and concerns outside of Amtrak and transportation issues, I believe I may have good thoughts to offer in Washington on energy, the environment, education, and the new information age we find

ourselves being thrust into without a map. At age 18, my first thoughts about a future career were to the effect that I thought I should help solve future energy problems in the labs of nuclear physics that would pave the way to cheap, abundant, clean energy through controlled fusion reactions. But in college, I discovered there was already a surplus of extremely bright physicists in that field fighting for funding, so I looked elsewhere for a field of endeavor that needed my talents more. I finally found one, fresh, new, and empty, half way through medical school: educational reform through technology. I spent many years in the bowels of the Children's Television Workshop (Sesame Street) working on "educational" software and experiments with new technology, and to this day still believe that my best work in that field lies ahead. My creative center, as best I know it, lies at the intersection of linguistics, education, and the technologies that power video games. Incredible new vistas of mind can come in our lifetime. Mastering computers began for me only as a means to an end, and then as a means to put bread on the table and put my first two sons (an artist and a mathematician) through college, and my youngest son into a fine kindergarten as I write.

Regarding the environment, I have found through my own research, for instance, these past six months, that neither the pro-environment nor the anti-rail forces in Washington have done their homework very well. Both sides puff unsubstantiated numbers a large percentage of the time. Even GAO reports I've read on energy efficiency and environmental impact, though well-intentioned, often seem to miss some of the critical determinants in their own arguments and rely on some tenuous assumptions. I like to think that I am fairly good at getting to the bottom of issues with at least the hope of coming back up with useful insights.

In another area of my concern, the information age we are entering may well be the most unwieldy two-edged sword man has ever invented for himself. I am aware that one of computing's legendary geniuses, Bill Joy, has already testified before Congress about his concerns regarding the dangers of rapidly advancing technology. He wrote a fascinating and alarming article entitled "Why the future doesn't need us" some six years ago, and, what with my being somewhere close to catching the thoughts at his wavelength, I'm concerned he could prove to be right. (His argument is that "self-reproducing" technologies threaten man's future planetary dominance and even our ability to survive: genetics, nanotechnology, and pervasive artificially intelligent computer systems being the culprits). Sometimes in being right, one may wish to be wrong. Hoping that he's either wrong or that we can find answers and antidotes in time, I believe my computing and scientific background may lend itself to these issues as well.

Despite my strong scientific, mathematical, medical, and computing backgrounds, back in college, it was the Princeton English Department that lobbied hardest to get me to join (though I didn't, and ended up in spectroscopy). I have always had unusually good writing and communication skills, and I pride myself at often being able to communicate the complex in understandable, approachable ways. In this regard, I would aspire to write in the manner and style of the great and quotable physicist Richard Feynman who served on the government's Challenger investigation board and turned physics into poetry in his published Cal Tech lecture series. At my new website,

www.understandingamtrak.com, I hope to help make rail issues more approachable for the general public and curious congressmen alike.

The other writer, however, in whose style and spirit I would aspire to write is Mitch Albom, the author of *Tuesdays with Morrie* and *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. My work on Amtrak issues, it turns out, has been the most spiritually intense experience of my life, something I think you can appreciate, and grounds for a good conversation should ever we meet.

A month before you were first elected President of the United States, in October of 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized Mother Katherine Drexel into sainthood, only the second Catholic saint (after Elizabeth Seton) to have been born on American soil. She lies now in a crypt in her shrine at the convent she built on the hill above the railroad station I have been fighting these six months to save. At first I thought it was a curious coincidence that she was only a hundred yards or so from where we park our cars and ride our trains to work each day. But then an old, retired railroad man explained to me that the legend among the rail line workers of Philadelphia, passed down to him in his younger years, was that she had given the land for the station to the Pennsylvania Railroad a hundred years ago on the condition that it be used for all time to bring the children of the city out to her convent for education and social care. I haven't confirmed or seen the details of the deed, but I have visited the convent and her tomb, and there they also confirm that the land of the station was once hers. She dedicated her life and the order of nuns that she founded – the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament – to the care and education of Blacks and Native Americans in the late 1800s, about 70 years before the American civil rights movement even began to catch up.

Saint Katherine also founded the only black Catholic college in America, Xavier University in New Orleans. Though the people of that town often sing that the saints will come marching in, I suspect the only living saint who ever walked the streets of their shining city – not on a hill, but below the sea – slipped in and out of town by train, perhaps even on the one they still sing of and call *The City of New Orleans*. Amtrak still sends it there every day from Chicago. The hurricane struck the city in the midst of my first attempts to save the station (with the name “Katrina,” incidentally, being a close cousin of the Anglicized name “Katherine,” but actually harking back to different root words like an ancient doppelganger come to ghostly, malevolent life – go figure!). For me, the storm and the saint and the station and the songs and the trains and the city all became one very strange blur of meanings and thoughts last September. And believe it or not, that's just the tip of the spiritual berg I've found even since then. I once watched the Twin Towers burn through the glass window of an Amtrak train on 9/11 as we made our way into Manhattan just before they closed the tunnels. I've wondered since that day why I was there to bear witness – what it meant – and all I know for sure is that I've practically made an art form of noticing twin towers of any sort, just about anywhere. Often I see them on twin-spired churches, and Trenton has at least three of them that I know of, including a beautiful one, the Sacred Heart, right by the tracks, giving me the gift of reverent pause each day just upon safely crossing the Delaware on Amtrak on the

way to work. And the train back the other direction leads to Washington, and all it takes for me to get there now is to not get off that train.

I'm still trying to save Cornwells Heights, and if that takes fixing Union Station and the rest of Amtrak to do it, so much the better. I hope that you can find it in both your heart and mind to so honor me with the gift of public service.

Sincerely yours,

Rick Booth