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The Republican House of Representatives is launching a series of hearings across the board both to investigate individuals and various government financed activities. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee is now Chaired by Congressman Sam Graves a longtime friend of for rail operations, maintenance, and construction contractors. The new Chairman of the House Railroad Subcommittee Congressman Troy Nehls (R-Tex) announced last week that a major Subcommittee goal will be oversight of Amtrak in an effort to increase efficiency and accountability. In an interview with Bloomberg, Nehls said, “We have just got to make sure that there’s some oversight, and that we ensure

that the billions that they are spending –that it’s being spent wisely. He stated he will scrutinize Amtrak’s operations and the plan to expand the intercity passenger rail network that was authorized in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 (BIL) with a \$65 billion appropriation. Both Graves and Nehls have expressed concern that while Amtrak ridership was plunging some twenty Amtrak top executives received better than \$200,000 each in an annual bonus. This will undoubtedly be the subject of future hearings.

These hearings will be interesting and I will follow them closely. Annual rail spending before BIL was \$3 billion. Beginning with fiscal year 2023 and through the next five years The capital spending grant number rises to about \$17 billion per year. No question Representative Nehls is an Amtrak sceptic. “When I think about Amtrak I mean, it just seems to be a loser,” said Rep. Nehls. “It is kind of like the Post Office. We keep funding, it using taxpayer money.” I am currently in communication with the T&I professional staff pressing the competitive agenda for passenger rail .

Thanks in part to our good efforts in the Senate over a year ago, the new infrastructure law rejected the Amtrak proposal for a \$75 billion Amtrak Trust Fund. It would have guaranteed putting Amtrak in complete control of intercity passenger rail. Instead, the law placed that responsibility for the intercity corridor expansion with the Federal Railroad Administration, not Amtrak. Further it made about \$14 billion in grant funds available to the states (not just Amtrak) . We will follow the hearings in Nehls Subcommittee closely. It will be an opportunity to point out to Congress that competition for corridor operations is the best method to improve efficient service with good jobs. .