

Majority Questions for the Record

Senator Roger Wicker

Question 1. Congressman Westmoreland, my colleagues, including Senator Nelson, Senator Booker, and others worked hard to ensure that passenger rail, including Amtrak, was authorized in the FAST act. Appropriators led by Senator Cochran funded the full Amtrak system - not only the Northeast Corridor but state supported and long-distance routes as well. When you were my colleague in the House, you voted against funding for Amtrak in general and the long distance routes in particular, on more than one occasion. Those long distance trains can provide a vital transportation link and economic development opportunities for rural areas including my state. Is that still your position?

Answer: When I represented my district, my constituents expected me to protect the taxpayers' interests. I used my vote to remind Amtrak that Congress was watching, and expected careful stewardship of the public investment in its system. One of the main roles of Congress is oversight and one of the most efficient ways to demonstrate Congress' close attention is through funding mechanisms. Amtrak got that message, and the significant efficiency improvements that followed helped to keep the national system viable. I think it is also important to note, I supported the 2015 FAST Act and voted for passage of the final version which reauthorized funding for Amtrak. I am very confident that the current Amtrak leadership will continue to provide our communities with the service they need, and I look forward to working with them to help make that happen.

Question 2. My colleagues and I have worked with a host of partners along the Gulf Coast to restore passenger rail service lost due to Katrina. A big supporter and necessary partner of this effort has been Amtrak. We cannot restore this vital service to Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida without that strong partnership with Amtrak. Are you going to be that partner?

Answer: I completely understand the interest the communities and their leaders and elected representatives have taken in the service restoration effort on the Gulf Coast. I have been impressed by the ongoing activity, and I look forward to working with you and with them to find a way forward as we explore all the available options for service restoration.
