

**OPENING STATEMENT OF ROBERT L. SUMWALT, III
NOMINEE TO
NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
BEFORE
THE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE
JUNE 8, 2017**

Thank you, Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, and distinguished Members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you today as you consider my nomination as a Member of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). I am grateful to President Trump for the confidence he has placed in me through this nomination.

I've been honored to be on the NTSB for nearly 11 years, where I have served as Member, Vice Chairman, and Acting Chairman.

In my most recent role as Acting Chairman, I have placed renewed focus on ensuring the agency lives our core values of Safety, Excellence, Independence, Integrity, Diversity and Inclusion, and Transparency.

During my tenure on the Board, I have been a fierce advocate for improving safety in all modes of transportation, including issues such as teen driver safety, impaired driving, distractions in transportation, and professionalism in aviation. I have testified before Congress regarding rail safety initiatives, including Positive Train Control and the transport of flammable liquids by rail. It has been my duty to serve as a voice of objectivity and reason when deliberating and determining the probable cause of more than 150 transportation accidents. I believe that to truly improve safety, the investigation must not simply stop at finding the obvious error, but instead, must uncover each underlying factor that led to the accident.

I've been privileged to serve as Chairman of the Board of Inquiry for a number of high-profile investigative hearings, including the 2009 Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) train-to-train collision near the Fort Totten Metro Station here in the District of Columbia. While that investigation identified technical failures within the train control system, it also uncovered systemic deficiencies, including WMATA's lack of a safety culture, the ineffective safety oversight by the WMATA Board of Directors, and the insufficient regulatory oversight and authority by the Tri-State Oversight Committee.

Although our transportation system generally performs very well, when transportation accidents do occur, it is imperative that we be able to reassure the American public that the Federal Government is conducting an honest, competent, thorough, and unbiased investigation. The Board must act with an objective, dispassionate eye, calling the facts as we see them, and then conducting a thorough analysis of those facts. But simply investigating the accident, alone, doesn't prevent accidents; to accomplish that, we must

use our analysis to formulate safety recommendations to government and industry. We must also follow up and track the status of those recommendations.

Clearly, the American public and the transportation community depend on the NTSB to fulfill its mission, not only in the wake of an accident, but also to be proactive through the Board's advocacy role and by conducting safety studies. Additionally, the NTSB has an important role in assisting victims and their families in the wake of transportation disasters. The NTSB must also keep up with emerging technologies in transportation, which have the potential to dramatically improve safety, but may present challenges, as well.

If confirmed, I will continue to support the Board in all its endeavors.

Mr. Chairman, if confirmed, I look forward to continuing to work in a professional and collegial fashion with my fellow Board Members, the dedicated NTSB staff, and this Committee, to enhance transportation safety for all.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.