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Congressional Record S. 9581 - Amtrak

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Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, will the Senator yield?

Mr. CASE. I am happy to yield such time as he may require to the majority leader.

Mr. MANSFIELD. I thank the distinguished Senator.

Mr. President, Amtrak is now over a year old and its success or failure has not as yet been firmly established. The continuation of passenger train service for most Americans is a very important matter. As I have indicated in the past, the Nation's railroads were abandoning their historic role in this regard.

I have had high hopes for Amtrak and, quite frankly, they have done some innovative things in this very brief time. Amtrak has embarked upon some imaginative high-speed railroad service in densely populated commuter areas. However, I wish the success story of Amtrak in the less populated sections of the country like Montana was as glowing. When the original routes for Amtrak were adopted, they decided to operate passenger train service across the northern tier of Montana which denied service to the vast majority of the State. After some discussion, Amtrak was convinced that they should reinstate passenger train service across the southern route, known as the Northern Pacific Line, on a 3-day a week basis. This decision was made for a 15-month period on a use-it-or-lose-it concept. I do not disagree with this but I do believe that the users should be given some encouragement in demonstrating how much they will want and use this passenger service. This has not been the case in Montana. I do not believe the 15-month period, which will come to an end in September, was a fair test as to how well the people of Montana will use passenger train service. They have been using this service despite the concerted effort of the railroads to discourage patronage.

Almost every day I receive one or two letters from Montana complaining about poor service by Amtrak for the State, poor schedules, later arrivals, discourteous personnel, inability to obtain reservations when trains are obviously not full. All the complaints would indicate that there is little desire to build up traffic on the southern route. I am aware that Amtrak has not had time to develop improved equipment and service throughout the entire system and I am confident that when Amtrak completely takes over from the previous railroad operators, things will improve. We cannot have a fair test as to how people from Montana will use this passenger service until such time as Amtrak upgrades its system in this area as well as the rest of the Nation.

Mr. President, I would like to ask the able chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Department of Transportation Appropriations, the junior Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROBERT C. BYRD), if he has received any indication from Amtrak officials as to whether they intend to extend the use-it or lose-it period for the southern route from Minneapolis to Seattle through Montana. Would the chairman agree that Amtrak should not only concentrate on the glamorous experimental service but must make a deter-

mined effort to upgrade passenger service to the less populated areas of the Nation?

Mr. ROBERT C. BYRD. Mr. President, I do agree with the statement of the distinguished majority leader. The majority leader wrote to me, as chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on the Department of Transportation. He also spoke to me on behalf of himself and his distinguished junior colleague regarding this matter.

The matter was discussed with Amtrak officials by the committee staff, the matter was discussed with high officials in the Department by me, and the matter was discussed by me with the Secretary of the Department of Transportation. May I say that out of those discussions I am encouraged to believe that what the distinguished majority leader hopes to achieve will be accomplished. It is my understanding that a decision by Amtrak will be made in July or August. The word used by a high official in the Department—I will not use his name—was "optimistic," indicating that he was optimistic, of course without being bound in any way.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time on the bill has expired.

Mr. ROBERT C. BYRD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 1 additional minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ROBERT C. BYRD. He could not make a binding promise, but he was optimistic; and from that I am encouraged, may I say to my leader, and I shall do everything I can to pursue this matter further.

Moreover, may I say, in response to the distinguished Senator from Connecticut (Mr. WEICKER) that there was no budget request for this item. It was discussed in committee, however, in the light of the correspondence received from the able Senator from Connecticut. I appreciate the fact that he is not offering an amendment today to add moneys for Amtrak. It is for this reason that I have assured him that I will do everything I can to see that the moneys are put in the supplemental bill, provided a budget estimate comes up. If the committee does not put the money in, we will have a vote on the floor in response to his efforts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

Mr. ROBERT C. BYRD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to proceed for 1 additional minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I am very much encouraged by what the distinguished chairman of the subcommittee has just said. I am sure it is concurred in by the ranking Republican member, the distinguished Senator from New Jersey; by the distinguished Senator from Colorado; and by the ranking Republican member of the Appropriations Committee, the distinguished senior Senator from North Dakota, as well as others who are affected by the lower part of what is now called the Burlington Northern but which used to be the old Northern Pacific Line.

In closing, I wish to restate that my colleague from Montana, Senator LEE METCALF, and I believe that not only should Amtrak continue the service on the southern route, but also the service should be extended to a new 7-day-a-week basis. The southern route serves the population centers of the State; and if Montana is to be given any consideration, these areas must have Amtrak service. The northern route expedites passenger traffic from the Twin Cities to the west coast and serves Glacier National Park, all of which is very important, all of which I approve.

But, Mr. President, we cannot ignore three-fifths of a State like Montana, which is as large as the empire of Japan—148,000 square miles—but which has a very small population of approximately 700,000, dependent in large part upon rail transportation because we do not have the air service.

Again, I thank the distinguished chairman and all the Senators on the floor who have indicated their support for this proposal.