



# NORTH DAKOTA SENATE

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EP 724



## Senator Tyler Axness

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## COMMITTEES:

Human Services  
Transportation

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Chairman Daniel Elliot  
Surface Transportation Board  
395 E. Street, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20423

Dear Chairman Elliot,

Good morning members of the Surface Transportation Board and welcome back to North Dakota to hear about our persistent railroad backlog emergency. For the record, my name is Tyler Axness. I am a North Dakota State Senator representing District 16 which is parts of Fargo and West Fargo. During the last legislative session I was a member of the Senate Transportation Committee.

I'm here before you today not only as a State Senator, but as a lifelong North Dakotan who grew up in a rural farming community. I'm here to share the stories and the many frustrations I've experienced and have heard across our great state particularly when it comes to equal railroad access.

Growing up in a farming community, I had the pleasure of experiencing the hard work that brings food to our tables across the nation. My first job was at a grain elevator where part of my duties was ensuring train cars were sealed and tagged properly before being shipped.

That was many years ago but the hard work of our famers has continued. Unfortunately, the reliability of getting their commodity to market and on the table has not kept up. This is evident by the stories I have heard from my farming friends in Benson County who estimate they've lost hundreds of thousands of dollars because of inadequate transportation.

Other farmers have told me they're just expected to put up another grain bin and add to their storage creating additional costs. We should not be burdening our hard working farming families with these unnecessary requests. The fact we have come to this point is unacceptable.

Others have visited with me about their concern about trains sitting near their farmstead for days idle. In fact one individual from around Harwood has documented the dates, times, and locations of idle trains. This is not only frustrating for those waiting to move their commodity, but a very real safety hazard for our public

As I'm sure you're aware it is at no fault of our farmers this backlog has occurred. Like many in this room I'm disappointed in delayed action from many of our officials. I'm frustrated with the railroads apparent lack of urgency. Quite frankly, I'm outraged at our State Government's lack of involvement during this time specifically through the Public Service Commission with railroad jurisdiction.

This backlogged railroad emergency is a systemic failure for our farmers and other industries that rely on access to the lines. It will only be resolved if everyone is at the table, honest, and ready to get to work. I ask that our railroads reassess their current rail capacity versus what is needed for all of our state's industries and undertake the needed investments to improve the service expected of them. I understand they have already begun that discussion and am encouraged.

As the Surface Transportation Board, I request that you hold these shippers accountable. Finally, I ask that you consider partnering with our Public Service Commission. The PSC needs to exercise their existing authority and make the work of our railroads transparent to the industries that are reliant on their service as a common carrier, and work jointly with your board to find North Dakota solutions.

The bottom line is this is a big problem and the only way to find a solution best fitted for North Dakota is if everyone is working together. Your presence here today is a great start. Thank you for coming back to North Dakota. I'll take any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tyler Axness', with a stylized, cursive script.

Tyler Axness

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