

## Rail bill important to Coloradans

LOCAL 983

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DENVER — The railroads don't care anything about safety. Well, that may be a bit of an overstatement; however, it's not far from true.

In July of 2015, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad offered a collective bargaining agreement to the conductors of the largest division on the system. BNSF proposed one-person train operations on specific territories where Positive Train Control (PTC) was operational. PTC is a technology that uses GPS, track-side signals and computer software to limit train operation and prevent collisions. The agreement also included a "roving" conductor who could perform the off-train tasks of a conductor. The "roving" conductor could provide service to multiple trains within a certain geographic territory

According to the railroads, PTC is supposed to provide all the in-cab functions of the conductor. However, in Colorado, PTC is installed but not operational on the BNSF and installation on the Union Pacific (UP) railroad is incomplete. Hopefully, PTC will eventually work but it will never have all the safety benefits of two people in the controlling cab of a freight train.

There are a variety of jobs that demand the redundancy of two-person crews for safe operation. A train crew, conductor and engineer, is similar to the crew of a commercial airline's navigator and pilot crew. Two people provide an ongoing feedback loop that technology cannot. For example, in poor weather, under stress and fatigue, during equipment failures or a crew failure (heart attack), and in the case of a terrorist or rogue operator, technology does not talk to,



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provide opinions or help the stress of a lone operator. Commercial airplanes have a second person in the cockpit to safeguard its precious cargo and a freight train should have a two-person crew as well.

In Colorado, trains haul a variety of cargo including lumber, coal, military equipment, crude oil and other hazardous materials. Because of the topography of our state and the efficiency in traveling the flattest route, most railroads run near rivers. Also, as part of their business in Colorado, railroads travel through cities and military installations. The railroads have operating rules and provide training to crews on hazardous materials, terrorist threats and security for the railroad and the train.

The railroads know that with vast territories and limited railroad-police resources, the train crew must be their eyes and ears while operating. Also, the capacity of the equipment (power), the size of the train (length and weight) and the hazardous materials shipped have all increased over time. The railroads want to operate longer, heavier more dangerous trains with just one person in the controlling cab. Given the railroads proximity to our water resources, lines through remote areas as well as dense urban areas and military bases, it doesn't make sense to have only one person on the train.

The railroads have had an economic boom over the last eight years. Colorado's class I railroads, BNSF and Union Pacific, have both benefited from record profits, even through the economic recession hit the rest of the country. How did they spend their revenue? They hired employees, purchased train equipment, built more tracks

and bought back shares of their own stock. They did not complete PTC, the safety technology they say is the replacement for the conductor but instead asked for an extension to the installation deadline.

In August 2015, the railroads mandated by Congress to install PTC (Railway Safety Improvement Act, 2008), asked for a 3-5 year extension on the deadline. In September, 2015, the class I railroads threatened to shut down all their traffic unless Congress granted a 3-year extension for PTC. Congress acquiesced and granted a 3-year extension on compliance and an additional 2-year waiver for those still unable to comply after that date. PTC — a safety system designed to save lives and prevent most train collisions, save the property and people of Colorado — is not important enough to the railroads or Congress to finish in 15 years!

Railroads are an important business because they safely and efficiently move large quantities of goods across enormous territories. They have done so for years and will continue to do so into the future. Even with changing strategies and conditions, the railroads have achieved many of their safety goals by relying on their train crews to handle the work and do it safely. Presently, all class I railroads across the United States rely on the efficiency and safety of two-person crews. The Colorado Rail Safety Bill (HB16-1136) demands that the railroads continue to support the two-person crew as the safety standard. Passing this bill insures train crews, their families and all Coloradans the safe rail operations we all deserve.

## Leaders issue strong dissent . . . , cont.

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Congress and the public know this deal fails everyday Americans and must be rejected by our elected representatives. The TPP is simply the latest in a long line of terrible trade pacts that ship jobs overseas and lower wages at home. At a time of outrageous economic inequality and stagnate wages, TPP is the last thing we should do.

Despite the efforts of supporters to frame this 12-nation Pacific Rim agreement as the gold standard and one that would stick up for the interests of millions of workers in the U.S. and abroad, the TPP fails on all accounts. Now that the text is no longer secret, many are seeing the agreement does not hold up under scrutiny.

Take, for instance, labor rights. While those promoting the trade deal said it would advance workers in member nations and allow the formation of unions, the actual language in the agreement offers only false promises of progress. In fact, countries with abysmal labor standards will have to do little, if anything, to comply with the commitments of the TPP's labor chapter. A country may have to adopt a minimum wage, but even one penny an hour would be sufficient to meet

the requirements of the TPP.

That, in turn, would negatively impact domestic manufacturing. U.S. workers can't compete with foreign workers toiling away in unsafe conditions and only making pennies a day, as is the case in countries like Vietnam. Simply put, this trade deal is designed to support the global supply chains of multinational companies through continued outsourcing of production and offshoring of jobs.

Enforcement is another failure of the trade deal. There are no integrated enforcement measures, even though the existing protocols are woefully insufficient. This should be a major concern for Congress. Lawmakers must refuse to consider the TPP or any other trade deals without more enforcement resources. American workers need a system that ensures unfair trade practices will be dealt with forcefully.

And as time passes, the problem will only get worse if TPP is enacted. A provision included in the document will allow other nations to sign onto the deal, extending its negative effects even further. China, South Korea, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand are just some of the potential entrants. TPP is the template for the future and its devastating effects

could grow dramatically over time. It already includes 40 percent of the global economy.

Rules of origin language in the TPP will take us backwards. These rules, which mandate how much content in automobiles and parts must come from TPP countries to get preferential trade treatment, would actually allow China or other countries outside of the TPP to provide a majority of the content. For purposes of the TPP, made-in-America could mean more than half of the car's value comes from China. That's simply unacceptable.

Currency manipulation will not be combatted in a meaningful way, practically ensuring this unfair, jobs-killing trade practice will continue. The U.S. trade deficit, already sky-high with many of our trading partners, will grow substantially under the TPP, because it does nothing to stop nations from tampering with their currency valuation to make the imports they ship cheaper, and the exports coming into their nations more expensive. That will only exacerbate the loss of American jobs if Congress approves TPP.

While elected officials often use hyperbole to talk about so-called critical votes they make, this is one time they won't be. The lives of millions of Americans will

be adversely affected if those on Capitol Hill ultimately vote to approve the TPP. That's why we and our coalition partners are speaking out forcefully against this deal. And it's why lawmakers must side with their constituents over corporate interests when they ultimately consider the trade agreement next year.

The TPP is not expected to come before Congress until June, and it could be put off even later, giving opponents more time to map strategy to defeat the legislation, which they will need given the strong opposition of multinational corporations throughout the world.

Steve Vairma, president of Teamster Joint Council 3 and an international union vice president, has urged all Teamster members to actively oppose the job killing TPP by writing their U.S. senators and representatives and urging them to oppose TPP.

"For their own good, all of our members, both Republicans and Democrats, should take an active role in the effort to defeat TPP," he said. For us, it's not a partisan issue, it's a workers' issue, and a very important one. We must stop these global trade agreements now. They are designed to ultimately transform our American workforce into a third world workforce."