

Washington Times
Letters to the Editor
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Rail competition

To paraphrase Ronald Reagan from the 1980 presidential debates: There they go again. The railroad industry is once again trying to sell the argument that any change in existing federal rail policy is "re-regulation." It is surprising that The Washington Times bought it so readily ("Rail ties," Editorial, Saturday). What's even more astounding is that The Times believes that those who advocate robust market competition don't support "conservative" principles.

Currently, the railroad industry enjoys broad federal government protections from liberal antitrust exemptions to the all-too-cozy relationship with its would-be regulator, the Surface Transportation Board that are both unfair and unnecessary, especially at a time when railroads are making record profits and buying back their own stock.

The nation can no longer afford policies that insulate the monopoly railroads from competition. In what is only the most recent example of industry excess, the nation's largest freight railroads were found to have systematically overcharged their customers by more than \$6.4 billion over four years by collecting excessive fuel surcharges. The feckless Surface Transportation Board found the practice unreasonable but offered no recourse for recovery; so those costs were then borne by consumers.

While The Washington Times might not recognize the scope of the rail problem, it is apparent that Congress is beginning to understand. A growing list of bipartisan cosponsors, including Rep. Ron Paul, Texas Republican, support legislation introduced by House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman James L. Oberstar, Minnesota Democrat, to remove federal protections and treat the freight rail industry like other American businesses. By supporting the Railroad Competition and Service Improvement Act, members of Congress can take a stand in defense of free markets and what most consider to be conservative principles.

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