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## Lies, Damned Lies, and Steve Forbes' Editorial

There's a quote made famous by Mark Twain: "There are lies, damned lies, and statistics." With his recent Forbes Magazine editorial, Steve Forbes managed to deliver all three in a single, sweeping act of reckless misinformation. His piece, thinly veiled as a policy argument, reads more like a sales pitch to Wall Street rail investors than a serious examination of rail safety. At the center of his argument? A deliberate misrepresentation of SMART-TD, our membership, and the American public's clear support for safe rail operations.

Let's set the record straight.

### We Didn't Buy the 2-Person Crew Rule—The American People Demanded It

In 2024, the Federal Railroad Administration finalized a long-overdue rule requiring a minimum of two certified crew members aboard freight trains in the United States. This wasn't a political favor or a product of "Big Labor" manipulation. It was the result of over **13,000 public comments** submitted during the FRA's public comment period, comments overwhelmingly in support of the rule. Fewer than 70 opposed it.

That's not lobbying. That's democracy.

Our rank-and-file members were the engine of that support. These are the same people who respond to derailments, operate massive machines through unpredictable terrain, and protect the communities these trains move through. They aren't political pawns: they are professionals and the truest industry experts. To claim that this rule was "dictated" by union bosses is not only false, it's an insult to every one of our members and to the will of the American public. A third-party polling firm found that Americans support the 2-PC rule by an **8-to-1 margin**. That's not political coercion, that's overwhelming public consensus.

### \$80 Million? That's Not Just Wrong. It's Fiction.

Mr. Forbes claims SMART directed nearly \$80 million toward political causes between 2019 and 2022. To get to that number, Mr. Forbes used a "study" from laborpains.org (which is a joint blog funded by anti-unionists and a right-wing PAC). The figure he/they came up with is laughably wrong. A brief visit to [OpenSecrets.org](http://OpenSecrets.org) (a resource even a summer intern could navigate) would show that **SMART-TD's National Political Action Committee had less than half a million dollars** on hand during that entire span. Not a dime of our members' dues goes to political candidates. Our PAC is funded **voluntarily** by members, rail and bus alike.

Our union is not a mega-donor. We do not have a blank checkbook. And we do not operate like the corporate entities Mr. Forbes routinely champions.

## A Purple Union, Not a Puppet For Anyone

Forbes claims we funneled 99% of our political spending to Democrats and progressive causes. Not only is that figure false, but it obscures the reality of how we engage with the political process. We're a proudly "Purple Union." That means we work with leaders on both sides of the aisle who support our members' safety, quality of life, and job security.

In recent years, SMART-TD has partnered with these lawmakers in putting forward legislation to protect our members:

- **Rep. Troy Nehls (R-TX)**
- **Sen. Deb Fischer (R-NE)**
- **Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY)**
- **Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO)**
- **Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE)**
- **Then-Senator, now Indiana Governor, Mike Braun (R-IN)**
- **Then-Senator, now Vice President, J.D. Vance (R-OH)**

We took heat from other unions for endorsing **Sens. Josh Hawley (R-MO) and Deb Fisher (R-NE) in the 2024 cycle**. SMART-TD has even contributed regularly to Senator Ted Cruz's Victory Fund for years. These are not the acts of a single-minded, blindly left-leaning organization. These weren't token gestures: they were endorsements rooted in action. Nearly **20% of our PAC dollars** went to Republicans, which is considerably higher than other unions in the transportation sector. In a pre-election internal survey, over 65% of our members supported President Trump.

We don't see politics as red versus blue. For us, it's "With Us" versus "Against Us."

## Safety Isn't a Talking Point. It's Our Mission.

Forbes argues that the East Palestine disaster proves more crew doesn't equal more safety because three people were onboard. That's a grotesque oversimplification of an incident that upended lives and exposed how fragile safety systems can be. Safety isn't about checking a box—it's about creating layers of redundancy, accountability, and human judgment when things go wrong.

Forbes goes into detail about the fact the Norfolk Southern N-32 train was fully staffed that February night in East Palestine and points out that the crew was unable to mitigate the situation. What he fails to point out is that neither did all of the technology that his friends at the railroad want to use to take our jobs. The lead engine on that train was a new unit fresh off the factory floor and was equipped with every bit of technology the railroad industry has come up with to replace us. At the time of the derailment, PTC was engaged and operational, and Trip Optimizer was running the engine. The

difference was that when the disaster occurred, that technology was done with its job. It got an early quit while the crew went to work. When that train left the rails, it was the crew that tied the hand brakes and coordinated with the Dispatchers to keep it from becoming a multi-train pile-up.

It was the crew that heard the detector alarm and had begun to slow the train so that more cars didn't come off the track. In the moment of adversity, it was the crew that mitigated the risk of the community and positioned themselves in a place where they could act as emergency responders. The PTC and the Trip Optimizer (the technology) did none of these things.

You don't need to be a railroader to understand that fatigue, terrain, mechanical failure, and emergency response all benefit from more eyes, hands, and minds on board. The 2-PC rule isn't a return to some outdated relic. It's a modern safety necessity built on over a century and a half of hard lessons, most learned in the blood of our members.

### Steve Forbes Can Speak for Wall Street. Not for Our Members.

Steve Forbes has never run a train. He's never sat in an engineer's seat through an overnight snowstorm. He's never helped clean up a wreck site or explained to a child why their father or mother won't be coming home from work.

So, he doesn't get to speak for our "rank-and-file." He doesn't get to speculate about how our dues are spent or speculate that our members don't believe in the 2-Person Crew Ruling. He certainly doesn't get to claim that safety regulations backed by working families, public consensus, and common sense are somehow an affront to innovation.


If he wants to write love letters to the railroad CEOs and investors who fund his ivory tower, that's his right. But he can't defame our union, slander our members, and fabricate statistics to serve his anti-labor agenda.

### Conclusion: We will Not Be Misinformed Into Silence

The rule was not bought. It was not political payback. It was the will of the people: railroaders, citizens, and communities, who demanded that safety be prioritized over profit.

Forbes' editorial is not just incorrect. It's a disservice to the truth, to the industry, and to the nation. And if he can get the facts this wrong—if he can inflate our contributions by 16,000%, ignore public comments, and misrepresent our values, he shouldn't be trusted with a single word on this subject again.

In Solidarity,



Jeremy R. Ferguson  
President – Transportation Division