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ONE YEAR AFTER EAST PALESTINE DERAILMENT

Rail industry blocks new safety rules

**Tony Romm**  
The Washington Post

Nearly one year after a Norfolk Southern freight train derailed in East Palestine, releasing toxic chemicals into the air and soil, the rail operator's top executive returned to the scene of the accident — and reiterated his promise of change.

"I want a response from Norfolk Southern that we can look back five years from now, 10 years from now, [and] we can be proud," Alan Shaw, the company's chief executive, said in an interview with local reporters in January.

In the nation's capital, however,

Norfolk Southern often has sounded a more defiant note: It has joined some of the nation's leading freight railroads in a bid to weaken newly proposed safety legislation, threatening to leave millions of Americans nationwide at risk of deadly derailments and dangerous chemical spills.

The target of the lobbying is a bipartisan proposal from Ohio's two senators: Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, and J.D. Vance, a Republican. Unveiled last spring as a direct response to the accident in East Palestine, the Railway Safety Act aims to toughen rail inspections, improve derailment-detection technology and ensure greater

safeguards for hazardous materials.

Publicly, Norfolk Southern and its peers have pledged to work with lawmakers on the bill. But the companies have still labored to severely weaken or eliminate some of its core provisions, according to 15 lawmakers, congressional aides, union officials and others, many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe private conversations.

"They will often say the right things, but then through their actions, and especially through their lobbying, move in a different direction," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a recent interview.

Over the past year, the nation's five largest rail operators together spent roughly \$17 million to lobby lawmakers, while donating generously to key members of Congress who oversee transportation issues, according to federal records. Some of the chief beneficiaries of industry cash were Republicans, who initially attacked the Biden administration over its handling of the East Palestine derailment before opposing or slowing down safety legislation.

In doing so, rail industry lobbyists also fought the Biden administration on even the most basic upgrades, from efforts to ensure that crew have

special breathing equipment onboard to new rules that would require mile-long trains to be staffed with more than one person. The staunch opposition has bogged down some federal action while leaving Congress unable to hold a single vote on rail safety legislation in the House or Senate.

"For 150 years, the rail industry has been one of the most powerful industries in the country," Brown said. "They have spent tens of millions of dollars lobbying. It's what they do. They're very good at it. We forgot how powerful they were."

See **RULES, B3**

THAT'S NO PLANE CRASH, IT'S A RECENT ADDITION



BRUCE BISHOP / CHRONICLE

A display of a plane is shown at a hillside behind Gregory Trucking on West River Road South in Elyria on Jan. 30. Not being a result of a crash, it is a recent addition to the hillside that looks more serious than it actually is. With help from heavy machinery, it sits at about 30 feet tall.

Locals producing documentary on first woman to run for president

**Christina Jolliffe**  
The Chronicle-Telegram

ELYRIA — Documentary? More like on the edge of your seat, wondering what she will do next, action-adventure biopic.

"Victoria Woodhull: Shattering Glass Ceilings" is a documentary about a woman whom most people don't know, but they should.

"She was almost an unbelievable character in many ways," said Bette Lou Higgins, producer and researcher for the project. "Her thinking was so far ahead of her time about social issues and not just for women."

Woodhull, born in 1838, took an interest in social issues that people didn't pay much attention to, such as health care.

She was part of the free love movement, which at the time advocated for women to have the right to choose not only whom they married, but when they could leave the marriage, without any repercussions.

"She exposed all of those things that people didn't talk about at the time," Higgins said.

And because she wanted women to get the right to vote and because she had political connections, she managed in 1871 to become the first woman to speak before Congress.

Did we mention she was also the first woman to run for president?

When speaking before Congress, Woodhull argued that there was no need for an amendment to give women the right to vote because the 15th Amendment already gave the right to vote to any citizen, and women were citizens. Obviously, Congress was not happy with her logic and tabled the discussion.

While not a suffragist at the time, Woodhull eventually joined the movement and in 1872 was nominated to run for president in 1872 for the Equal Rights Party. She was not quite old enough to run, but



PHOTO PROVIDED

The documentary "Victoria Woodhull: Shattering Glass Ceilings" details the life of the 19th century advocate of women's rights. It includes interviews with top historians and reenactments by local talent including Kate Luke of Oberlin, portraying Victoria; 9-year-old Aspen Bott, portraying a young Victoria; and Debra Rose of Oberlin, narrating.

that didn't stop her.

Even within the women's rights movement, she was tumultuous.

"Some suffragists thought she was way too radical, others thought she could move the party ahead," Higgins said.

Sadly, her bid for the country's top office did not materialize.

With all of her political activity, it's hard to imagine, but Woodhull also owned a newspaper with her sister and her husband. She wrote an article about a reverend having an affair with the wife of a friend. Her sister wrote a story about two men assaulting a girl in New York City.

Lawsuits were brought against Woodhull, her sister and her husband for sending pornography through the mail. All three were arrested and Woodhull spent Election Day in jail. She was released and the charges were dropped because it was found the law did not apply to newspapers.

"It was the biggest scandal in the country at the time," Higgins said.

The documentary includes interviews with top historians and reenactments by local talent, including Kate Luke of Oberlin, portraying Victoria; 9-year-old Aspen Bott, portraying a young Victoria; and Debra Rose of Oberlin, narrating.

The documentary was filmed in the fall and is scheduled to be completed this spring.

This isn't Higgins' first run at a documentary, having worked on the Emmy-nominated "Trail Magic: The Grandma Gatewood Story."

Higgins, who has been the artistic director of Eden Valley Enterprises since 1977, and has a bachelor's degree in theater and a master's degree in education technology, began working in film by accident after the Buckeye Trail Association contacted her to do some voice work in 2005.

The project was about the Buckeye Trail, but all Higgins could

think about was one line they had her read about a woman named Grandma Gatewood.

"I thought, 'Never mind the Buckeye Trail, who the heck is Grandma Gatewood?'" Higgins recalled.

At the age of 67, Emma Gatewood was the first woman to hike the Appalachian Trail solo in 1955.

Higgins got in touch with Gatewood's youngest daughter and learned as much as she could about the trailblazer. Throughout the conversation, Gatewood's daughter mentioned wanting to publish her mother's diaries or get a film made.

Higgins called a filmmaker friend who said, "Tell her we'll do it."

"I'm a theater person, so I follow direction and before I knew it, I told her we would do it," she said.

Seven years later, the film was finished, earning multiple awards and nominations, including an Emmy nod.

"Victoria Woodhull was so interesting to me that crazy enough, I decided to do it again," Higgins joked.

Peter Huston, of Film Affects, directs the Victoria Woodhull documentary, and Kelly Boyer Sagert wrote and researched the project.

Eden Valley Enterprises is a nonprofit organization offering unique educational experiences, specializing in living history programs, storytelling and musical trips back in time, as well as other programs, having produced more than 40 original productions.

"Trail Magic: The Grandma Gatewood Story" is available for sale on the Eden Valley website and available for streaming on Vimeo.

Information about the upcoming documentary is available at [victoriawoodhullforpresident.org](http://victoriawoodhullforpresident.org).

Contact Christina Jolliffe at [ctnews@chroniclet.com](mailto:ctnews@chroniclet.com).

FOOD DISTRIBUTION

**Black River Landing drive-thru mobile pantry,** 3:30-5:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 8, at Black River Landing, 421 Black River Lane, Lorain. Call (440) 960-2265 for more information.

**Brookside High School drive-thru mobile pantry,** 4:30-6 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 21, at Brookside High School, 1662 Harris Road, Sheffield. Call (440) 960-2265 for more information.

**Lorain High School drive-thru mobile pantry,** 4:30-6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 22 at Lorain High School, 1600 Ashland Ave., Lorain. Call (440) 960-2265 for more information.

**Ely Stadium drive-thru mobile pantry,** 4-5:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 26, at Ely Stadium, 1915 Middle Ave., Elyria (enter through Oberlin Road entrance). Call (440) 960-2265 for more information.

**Oakwood Park drive-thru mobile pantry,** 2-4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 29, at Oakwood Park, 2047 E. 36th St., Lorain. Call (440) 960-2265 for more information.

**Heather Campbell Reich Community Meals,** 6-6:30 p.m. today, 12 and 26; Tuesday, Feb. 6; Wednesday, Feb. 7 and 28 at St. Andrew's Church, 300 Third St., Elyria.

**LCCAA Produce Center ordering windows** are open 8 a.m. Monday through 11 p.m. Sunday or until all appointments are full. Pickup is Wednesday and Thursday, 204 W. 10th St., Lorain (former LCCAA Bike Shop). Service is available weekly on a first-order, available-appointment basis to anyone in Lorain County living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Visit [www.lccaa.net/programs/produce\\_center](http://www.lccaa.net/programs/produce_center) to order or for more information.

**St. Agnes Table of Plenty Food Pantry,** gates open at 9:30 a.m., food distribution is 10 a.m. to noon at 611 Lake Ave., Elyria. Distribution is the fourth Saturday of the month on the following dates: Feb. 24; March 23; April 27; May 25 and June 22. Enter on Bath Street. Car trunks should be clean and empty. Only Elyria residents.

**St. Elizabeth Center hot meals:** breakfast, 9-10 a.m. second and fourth Saturday of every month; lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; dinner, 5-6 p.m. Wednesday at 2726 Caroline Ave., Lorain. Call (440) 242-0056 for more information.

**First United Methodist Church community breakfast,** at 9:30-10:30 a.m. every Sunday at 312 Third St., Elyria. Carryout packages are handed out at the Holly Lane kitchen entrance.

**Cornerstone United Methodist Church free community breakfast,** 9-11 a.m. every third Saturday at 2949 West River Road, Elyria. Call (440) 324-1202 for more information.

See **FOOD, B2**

FUNDRAISERS

**Wellington Kiwanis annual pancake day,** 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4-7 p.m. Friday, Feb. 9, at the Wellington Eagles Hall, 631 S. Main St., Wellington. Pre-sale tickets are \$6 and can be purchased at Bremke Insurance, 104 S. Main St.; Fifth-Third Bank, 161 E. Herrick Ave.; Main Street Wellington, 118 W. Herrick Ave.; Colonial Barber Shop, 121 W. Herrick Ave.; and the Office on Aging on the third floor of the Town Hall. Meals are \$4 for children 8 and under. Tickets purchased at the door will be \$7. Take-out service will be offered. Arrangements to purchase tickets can be made by email at [wellingtonkiwanis@yahoo.com](mailto:wellingtonkiwanis@yahoo.com) or through the club's website at [www.wellingtonohkiwanis.org](http://www.wellingtonohkiwanis.org).

**The Kiwanis Club of Elyria's second annual Trivia Night,** doors open at 6 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, at St. Mary's Hall, 320 Middle Ave., Elyria. Tickets are \$25 per person and include 10 rounds of trivia, pizza, salad, soda, water, beer and door prizes. Guests are welcome to bring their own snacks and adult beverages. There will also be a basket auction, Heads or Tails and a 50/50 raffle. Bring a team of up to eight players or a team can be made of attendees. Register and pay online at [www.elyriakiwanis.net](http://www.elyriakiwanis.net) or call (440) 322-5867.

**Designer Purse Raffle,** doors open at 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, at the Lorain County Fairgrounds, 23000 Fairgrounds Road, Wellington. Information available at [www.mainstreetwellington.org](http://www.mainstreetwellington.org). Tickets are \$50 per person and include: Hot meal catered by Bread-N-Brew, dessert, three drink tickets for pop, beer, seltzer or Matus wine and a chance to win one of over 20 prizes, including designer purses from Coach, Michael Kors, Kate Spade or Dooney & Bourke, with additional raffles and games available to play.

**Big Brothers Big Sisters of Lorain County's annual Night at the Races,** 6-11 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, at Nick Abraham Auto Mall, 1111 E. Broad St., Elyria. All-inclusive tickets are \$50 and include food and drinks. To purchase tickets and learn more, go to 2024BigRace.givesmart.com or visit the BBBSLC website at [BigLorainCounty.org](http://BigLorainCounty.org). All proceeds benefit mentoring and support programming for Lorain County children.

**Nathan Perry Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution Steak Fry,** 5-9 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10, at American Legion Post 30, 1112 W. Erie Ave., Lorain. Menu: Steak, baked potato, salad, dessert, coffee, iced tea. Pick up or dine in: \$25 per meal. Music provided by DJ Mike Wheeler. Reservation deadline is Feb. 5. For more information, contact [nathanperrynsdar@gmail.com](mailto:nathanperrynsdar@gmail.com). Mail check to Nathan Perry Chapter, NSDAR, P.O. Box 183, Vermilion, OH 44089. All proceeds will go toward veteran events, parks and Lorain County nonprofit Path and Green.

See **FUNDRAISERS, B4**