

QJ Dedication Speech at Rock Island

HENRY POSNER III • SEPTEMBER 14, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

I would like to start with a couple of milestones in history. As the Mayor noted, I worked on the Rock Island in the summer of 1976 when it was a bankrupt railroad; this was four years before it finally shut down and was liquidated.

Then in 1982, I traveled to China; this was in the first years that Westerners could visit China. I visited the Datong locomotive factory where the QJ ("Leaping Forward") Class locomotives were constructed, and in fact, these locomotives were built until the year 1989. In 2004 I went back to China and saw these locomotives running in the very last place that they ran in main line service, the JiTong Railway.

So it is really two historical threads coming together—the fact that the Iowa Interstate Railroad survived to this day so that we can be running these trains, and also that the JiTong kept steam going in regular service until the end of 2005. This was the World's Last Steam Main Line. You see before you two QJs: the 7081 hauled the world's last regularly-scheduled steam passenger train, and the other, the 6988, hauled the world's last regularly-scheduled steam freight train. So this is a lot of railroad history and not just about the Rock Island. This is world railway history; this is also about globalization.

Today's events are happening because a lot of people chose not to say "no". There are all kinds of reasons to not run trips like these, for example, concerns about liability, etc., and usually you do not get rewarded in America these days for doing something like this. I would therefore especially like to thank the Iowa Interstate team for its allowing this event to happen. Denny Miller is the President of the Iowa Interstate Railroad and his team has been responsible for organizing the train part of the trip. And the 261 Group is of course responsible for the rolling stock and the overall management of this train.

I just want to let you know who the Iowa Interstate team is. The Iowa Interstate Railroad won the Harriman Award for Safety in 2004 because in 2003 we had an entire year with no personal injuries. That is quite a safety record and safety is the number one objective of the Iowa Interstate Railroad. Our priorities, in descending order, are a safe railroad; a railroad with a growing traffic base; and a profitable railroad. It is not as important to be profitable as it is to be safe and growing, as you are more likely to have a profitable railroad if you run it safely and grow the business. Denny and his team have really pulled this off.

Now let's talk about China. When I was in China in 1982, I was on a bridge that is not unlike the Government Bridge that we will be crossing later this evening; it is the combination rail and highway bridge at Nanjing. The bridge had replaced a rail ferry not too many years before I was there and, in fact, the ferries were still there "just in case". The Soviets tried to bridge the Yangtze River and they couldn't do it, so the Chinese did it themselves. They also built the Chengdu-Kunming Railway which is 1,000 kilometers long and 600 of those kilometers is either a bridge or a tunnel. So it is almost like riding a 1,000-km long subway. More recently our Peruvian affiliate Ferrocarril Central Andino was the

loser of the title “World’s Highest Railway” because the Chinese built another line that “couldn’t be done”—the line into Tibet. China is a country for which the railways are the lifeblood and China is a country that is probably the world’s best when it comes to building railways. So how could we not honor Chinese rail history and at the same time preserve these examples of the world’s last series production main line steam locomotives? This is one of those things that would have been very easy to rationalize why to not do it, or why it couldn’t be done. But in this particular case, we didn’t see anyone else putting up their hands, so this is why we are involved with these locomotives.

While we may be the proud owners of these locomotives, we hope that we won’t be in the long-run. The idea is to try to find homes for them with tourist railroads or others in the USA like the tourist railroad in Boone, Iowa, that has been running with Chinese steam for more than 10 years.

I would like to recognize some other people who are here besides Denny Miller, who I’ve already introduced. Qiang Ge is the President of Multipower International which is an international trading company based in New Jersey. He is the one who was able to bridge the gap between the U.S. and China in terms of getting things done in both countries to bring these locomotives here. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Steve Sandberg. Steve and his 261 Group are probably the most professional steam operator today in the USA. They run a safe operation and that’s why they’ve come back to the Iowa Interstate Railroad after their trip on our railroad two years ago. We are very happy that it was their idea that we run the QJs on this weekend’s trips.

I would also like to recognize Dennis Daugherty. Dennis is one of that rare breed of people who I would describe as a “Hero of Steam”. We basically made a deal over the phone for him to go to China and be the project manager for getting these locomotives overhauled in China to U.S. specifications. This was quite a daunting task from a technical, cultural and logistical perspective, but he is the guy who is the reason that we are having this event today. These locomotives did not arrive in the USA until the end of June and here we are today with these locomotives ready to haul their first revenue train. So, Dennis, you are officially a Hero of Steam. Why? Because I say so.

I would like to close by thanking all of you for coming here. It is really great to see how many people have come from all over for this. I see Dave Corbitt who as a teenager I used to watch trains with in New Jersey. I see Jim Suhs who I went on my honeymoon with in 1982, along with 98 other steam locomotive enthusiasts. (Yes, my wife and I are still married.) Finally I would like to acknowledge the presence of Ron McElrath who has been with us making documentary videos in Guatemala, Peru and Estonia.

Let me close by thanking all of you who bought tickets and who made the time to come out for this tonight. Enjoy the trip. The reason we do this is to remind people that there is still very much a railroad that runs on what used to be the Rock Island from Chicago to Omaha. But until the day when someone figures out a way to fund passenger service on a regular basis, this is probably the best we’re going to be able to do passenger-wise. We are reminding people that there is a railroad; that we haul freight; that we haul it safely; and that every so often we do something really neat, and unusual, in style.

Thank you very much and have a safe day.

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