

Amtrak Locomotive #174
Mark B. Kenny Dedication Ceremony
Philadelphia, PA
March 14, 2025
Remarks by BLET NST David P. Estes

Good morning and thank you for traveling to Philadelphia to join the Kenny family in honoring Mark today. Special thanks go to Amtrak — and particularly Stephen Gardner, Gerhard Williams and Andrea Gansen — for today’s historic dedication of Amtrak Locomotive No. 174 to Mark’s memory. Additionally, I would also like to acknowledge former BLET Vice President and National Legislative Representative John Tolman for his efforts in helping this dedication come to fruition.

I served as Mark Kenny’s Secretary-Treasurer for 15 years, and as his Vice Chairman for 8 years. From those offices I was able to witness a union leadership career that was legendary. Over 26 years as General Chairman, elected seven consecutive terms by acclamation, and 10 years as a Local Chairman before that. Appointments to Standing Committee assignments for six consecutive BLE and BLET Conventions. Negotiation of dozens of collective bargaining agreements, including perhaps the most controversial agreement in Amtrak history in 2007, and representation in hundreds of arbitration cases.

If you knew Mark, you also knew that the seminal event that led to his remarkable career as General Chairman occurred during the early morning hours of January 29, 1988, when he miraculously escaped death just south of here — in Chester, Pennsylvania — in a horrific collision of Amtrak train #66 with Maintenance of Way Equipment. That wreck led to a personal dedication and

focus on Mark's part to make both the union and the railroad more accountable to the safety concerns of passenger engineers, over and above their economic needs.

Mark Kenny demanded — and persuaded Amtrak — that the Organization had to be represented at the table when training programs and curriculums were designed and revised. He insisted — and convinced Amtrak — that the Organization could offer unique expertise and value by participating in hiring interviews. He fought for a Red Block program that was the industry standard setter for more than a decade, and to improve critical incident response and support programs for BLET members. And he was one of the earliest BLET General Chairman to advocate for confidential close call reporting.

The partnership Mark Kenny created with Amtrak in these endeavors is at a level unmatched in the railroad industry. And that partnership reflects the fact that Mark fought **for** Amtrak as hard as he fought **against** Amtrak. There were many times during his tenure as General Chairman that everyone had to contend with a White House or a Congress that was hostile to Amtrak. But, whenever anti-Amtrak storm clouds gathered on the horizon, you could count on Mark to help organize and lead a charge up Capitol Hill to secure the necessary funding and other commitments to keep the trains running. And I can tell you he viewed that as a critical part of his job as General Chairman, as well.

The fact of the matter is that Mark Kenny left Amtrak a better place than he found it, just as he left the BLET a better place than he found it. Today's dedication is a fitting memorial to a great man, and a source of comfort and pride to Mark's family and friends.