

Railroad industry slows down on safety

Train operators seek to weaken proposed rules a year after Ohio accident

BY TONY ROMM

Nearly one year after a Norfolk Southern freight train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, 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.

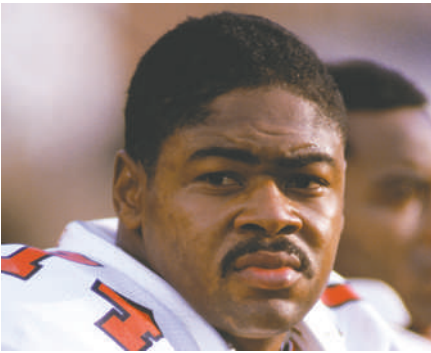
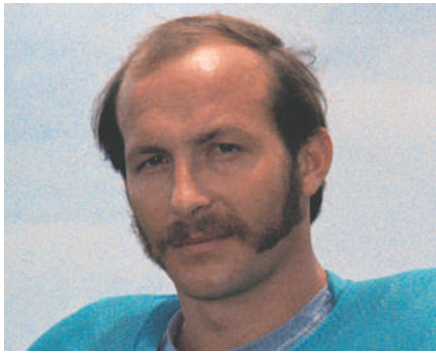
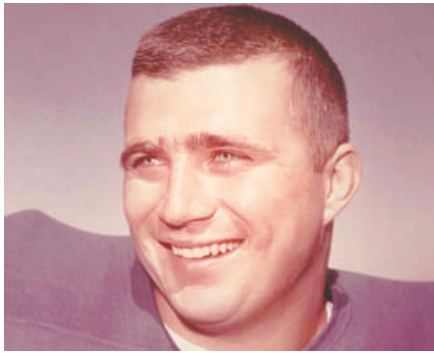
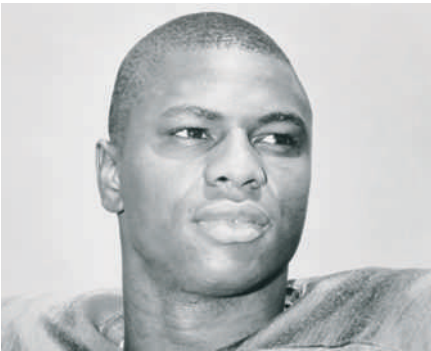
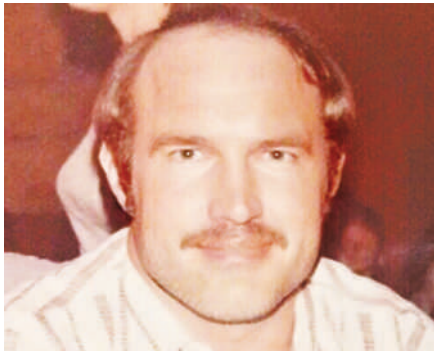
The target of the lobbying is a bipartisan proposal from Ohio's two senators: Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, and J.D. Vance, a Republican. Unveiled last spring as a direct response to the accident in East Palestine, the Railway Safety Act aims to toughen rail inspections, improve derailment-detection technology 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 SEE RAIL SAFETY ON A6

THE CONCUSSION FILES



Broken promises, shattered hopes

The NFL concussion settlement assured ailing former players that they would receive payments.

But because of strict guidelines and aggressive reviews, hundreds diagnosed with dementia have been denied, including many who died with CTE, a Washington Post investigation found. Section AA

PHOTOS BY BUFFALO BILL S. GEORGE ROSE/GETTY IMAGES, TONI L. SANDY'S/THE WASHINGTON POST, PHILADELPHIA EAGLES, HEIMKREITER FAMILY, FULTON FAMILY, HINES FAMILY, GENE PUSKAR/AP, PAUL SPINELLI/NFL PHOTOS, LOTHAMER FAMILY, JAKE SCOTT/AP

Trump ally emerged from shadows to rattle Ga. case

Opposition researcher Mike Roman in spotlight after bombshell brief

BY JON SWAINE, SHAWN BOBURG AND JOSH DAWSEY

As Mike Roman spoke to a gathering of fellow conservative activists in March 2022, he offered a glimpse of the intelligence-gathering skills he had honed over the previous decade working as an opposition researcher for Donald Trump and Republican megadonors.

"I show my wife this all the time when we go to a hotel," Roman told the crowd in Harrisburg, Pa., according to an audio recording reviewed by The Washington Post. "She logs on to the Hilton WiFi, and I go on and I 'tap, tap, tap,' and I show her everybody else that's on there and how we could get into their computer."

After spending years digging in the shadows, Roman is now in the spotlight, having landed a damaging blow to the racketeering case that Georgia prosecutors are pursuing against Trump and more than a dozen others — including Roman — for trying to overturn the 2020 election. Roman has pleaded not guilty.

In a bombshell legal filing on Jan. 8, Roman's attorney alleged that Fulton County District Attorney Fani T. Willis (D), who is heading the prosecution, is in a romantic relationship with Nathan Wade, an outside lawyer she hired for the case. While Wade's firm was receiving more than \$650,000 in public funds, Wade — who has been embroiled in a messy divorce — was paying for vacations with Willis in the Caribbean and elsewhere, according to Roman, who alleges that Willis improperly benefited.

In a court filing Friday, Willis acknowledged a "personal relationship" with Wade. SEE GEORGIA ON A12

Jan. 6: High court may say whether Trump committed insurrection. A14

ELECTION 2024

Joe Biden's time in the wilderness

Period between son Beau's death and 2020 bid had him casting about for meaning, associates say

BY MATT VISER



JABIN BOTSFORD/THE WASHINGTON POST

The few years following his son Beau's 2015 death, which is a window of interest in the House impeachment inquiry, upended Joe Biden's expected bow from political life.

Several months before Joe Biden left the vice presidency, Louis Freeh, the former FBI director, began messaging Hunter Biden in hopes of enticing his father into a business partnership. Freeh was already working with Hunter, but seemed intent on reeling in the senior Biden.

"I would be delighted to do future work with you. I also spoke to [your] Dad a few weeks ago and would like to explore with him some future work options," Freeh, who ran an international security firm, wrote in July 2016. "I believe that working together on these (and other legal) matters would be of value, fun and rewarding."

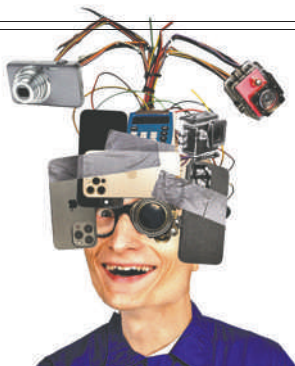
The message arrived as Joe Biden was contemplating a novel idea for the first time in nearly five decades: what life outside of elected office might look like. It came during a four-year period — from May 2015, when his son Beau died and Joe Biden lost his purpose, to April 2019, when he launched a presidential campaign and in a very real way regained it — that marked

SEE BIDEN ON A10

South Carolina: Biden wins the first official vote of the Democratic primary season. A5

METRO D.C. legislators are near a first vote on sweeping anti-crime legislation.

SPORTS This time around, the NFL finally played fair on the coaching carousel.



BUSINESS Apple's new Vision Pro feels like a privacy mess, Geoffrey A. Fowler writes.

TRAVEL A dozen destinations to consider for trips full of food, wildlife and nature.



ARTS & STYLE How one man's advance plans brought Beatlemania to America.

BOOK WORLD The story of an asylum whose patients built it, brick by brick.

\$115 SUNDAY COUPON INSERTS

CONTENT © 2024 The Washington Post / Year 147, No. 53751

