

JOHN A. SPRING

MAYOR, CITY OF QUINCY, ILLINOIS

MARRIED: To the former Karen Jansen of Quincy, Illinois.
Father of 3 children: Stacey Staff, Josh and Michael.
Grandfather of 3: Sarah, Jack and Mike Staff

EDUCATION: Bachelor's Degree, University of Missouri.
Graduate Work at Notre Dame University.

BUSINESS EXPERIENCE:

2005-Present Mayor, Quincy, Illinois
1998-2005 Fire and Police Commissioner.

Before being elected as Mayor, John Spring was a school administrator and Director of the Quincy Notre Dame Foundation for 29 years. Prior to that he was a teacher and coach

AFFILIATIONS:

Member U.S. Conference of Mayors
Member Affordable Housing Committee, U.S. Conference of Mayors
Member Transportation Infrastructure Committee, National League of Cities
Mayors Advisory Council Amtrak
Board member Salvation Army
Member National Abraham Lincoln Bi-centennial Committee

Spring is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the Illinois Municipal League.

National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission

Testimony
Chicago, Illinois
April 19, 2007

Commissioners, thank you for this opportunity to speak before you regarding the need for improvements to surface transportation and its infrastructure.

I am John Spring, Mayor of Quincy, Illinois. Over the past decade or so great strides have been made, and are still being made, in improvements to our highways in West Central Illinois. And while we will continue to champion those ongoing changes, we have become acutely aware of the need for upgrading our passenger rail services. Last October Amtrak added trains to 3 of its Illinois routes. The Quincy-Galesburg-Chicago route was one of the routes selected to gain a second train. I cannot begin to tell you how excited we were. Ridership between Quincy and Chicago had already been growing prior to the introduction of the second train, but with that second train our ridership continued to increase and is up approximately 45% over February 2006. I believe it's all about the convenience and safety of a train ride. I am a good example of this. I rode the train here to Chicago last night eliminating the need for me to miss a full day of work yesterday.

All 3 of the routes that gained another train have colleges and universities along those routes. Students along the Chicago to Quincy corridor are no longer forced to ride on just one train and miss classes or other important arrangements. They have taken advantage of the additional train. As a parent I can assure you that not only are the students grateful, but so are their families. We breathe a little easier knowing our children are safely on the train rather than driving or riding in a car.

High gas prices have made driving less attractive as well as highway systems that are becoming overcrowded in areas with high-density populations

Today, passenger rail can play a big part in the United States becoming less dependent on foreign oil. Rail is a far more fuel-efficient way to travel.

To maintain our ridership and the implied safety and convenience we need to invest more dollars. The State of Illinois recently increased funding for Amtrak allowing for the additional trains. However, that is not going to be enough. We need permanent funding from the federal government, similar to the way we fund highways and airports. State and local communities want and need to invest in continuing and providing even better rail service, but the lack of a federal matching program hinders real growth.

I believe we can increase ridership even more once we can consistently achieve the quality of service our passengers deserve. Signalization must be modernized and track capacity increased to eliminate delays. Ideally we need to remove a number of rail crossings by creating either a rail or road bridge, allowing for higher train speeds and the best possible crossing safety. This will also help to reduce freight congestion as freight business is booming across the state. Our current rail infrastructure can't efficiently handle the freight traffic and passenger service volume.

We want to see people have more of a choice for passenger rail in our state. Mayors from Rockford, Galena, the Quad Cities, Peoria and Decatur have noted the ease and safety of rail travel and the economic development possibilities. Presently none of these Illinois communities have Amtrak service. They are demanding that rail service be expanded to their communities and I can understand why.

I realize that we are talking about millions of dollars, but that is what will be necessary to achieve high quality, reliable rail service throughout the State of Illinois. This is a challenge we need to accept and meet. The traveling public is demanding transportation alternatives that are affordable, convenient and safe. Rail transportation answers all those demands. Illinois has demonstrated a willingness to invest operating funds in passenger trains. The next thing on the agenda is capital investments to infrastructure that will achieve quality and reliability in rail service.

In closing I would like to thank the commission for this opportunity to speak to you today. My community of Quincy has been one of the fortunate ones since our passenger rail service via Amtrak has survived since its origination in the early 1970s. It's hard to believe that in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a general feeling that trains, both freight and passenger, were on their way out. Air travel and interstate highways were pulling more and more customers away from the trains. However, those companies and cities that were able to keep rail service and survive the early 1980s are now operating at capacity and with the need greater than ever before to relieve ourselves of the dependency on foreign oil, passenger rail is our future. We must make it happen.

Thank you