

numbers. This personal attention allows services to be tailored to the specific needs of their clients.

Commerce Bank President and CEO Ignacio Urrabazo sees the expansion as part of a larger commitment to help accommodate the outstanding growth that Laredo is currently experiencing. Mr. Urrabazo supports a community-oriented banking approach, and is active in minority causes. In 1999, he co-founded Minbanc, a nonprofit organization which works to support and promote the continued success of minority-owned banks across America. Mr. Urrabazo also endeavors to encourage minority businesses in the oil and gas industries.

I am honored to recognize the Commerce Bank and its President Ignacio Urrabazo on the opening of their new headquarters in Laredo. The outstanding work put forth by the Commerce Bank and President Urrabazo helps foster Laredo's continued economic growth and success.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

HON. BETTY McCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 20, 2005

Ms. McCOLLUM of Minnesota. Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to represent in the U.S. Congress thousands and thousands of refugees who live in St. Paul and the East Metro area. Whether they are originally from East Asia, East Africa, Eastern Europe or Central America, Minnesota is now their home and we call them our neighbors, our co-workers and our friends.

The resettlement of refugees in Minnesota is a success story. We should all celebrate the economic, social and cultural contributions made over the past generation who found peace, hope and opportunity in Minnesota. For the refugees and the communities that welcomed them it has not always been easy, but it has worked and worked to the benefit of our state.

Let me acknowledge the state, county and local government officials as well as the staff and educators from our school districts who work so hard to get families settled and transitioned to life in Minnesota. Let me also thank the resettlement agencies, community based non-profits, the faith community and the many families and volunteers. This collective effort has kept the refugee resettlement experience positive for both new Minnesotans as well as long-time residents.

While today is a celebration of sorts, I do not want anyone here to forget that suffering also continues for the more than 19 million people around the world fleeing persecution. The fact that more than nine million people are refugees and almost eight million more are internally displaced inside their own country due to violence—while millions more are stateless or seeking asylum.

Earlier this year I traveled to Eastern Chad to visit refugees in camps along the border of Sudan's Darfur region. The men, women and children I met had escaped the horrors of mass murder, mass rape, the burning of their villages, the killing of their animals and the poisoning of their wells. These exhausted souls were the survivors a genocide that continues to go on today—at this very moment.

Just as Minnesota has been a refuge—a place of safe, I want to publicly commend the people of Chad, a very, very poor nation with difficult geography, little water and few resources, for providing nearly a million Sudanese survivors of genocide a safe place. In normal times the people of Chad have very little, now they are sharing what they have with the Darfur refugees.

In Darfur, at least 180,000 people have been killed, starved to death or died of disease because of the intentional campaign of cleansing by the militias sponsored by the government of Sudan. Tens of thousand of women and girls have been raped and tortured in this campaign of terror.

Inside Sudan almost 2 million people are displaced—driven from their homes. Let me praise the work that Hugh Parmer and his staff at the American Refugee Committee are doing to keep people alive in Sudan—they are true heroes.

In the camp I visited in Chad the women were exhausted, the children were restless and the men were few—most had been killed. The struggles of daily life were unimaginable—little water, little food, almost no shelter and only very limited health services. The trauma of escaping genocide, surviving rape, watching one's family be murdered is almost too much to comprehend. Yet, these brave souls fight on to care for their children, hope for the future and work together to make the most of every day.

The people of the U.S. are helping—and helping a lot. More than \$1 billion in aid and emergency humanitarian relief has been provided to keep people alive. The courageous humanitarian workers who help deliver this relief take big risks and work tirelessly and they deserve both our praise and our prayers.

The crisis in Darfur is man-made, not some natural catastrophe. This is genocide—mass, planned murder of thousands. This is a horror. Ending the genocide in Darfur requires more than humanitarian aid—it requires the political will of nations—especially the United States willing to stand up and say these lives have value—this killing must be stopped. Every diplomatic, political, and if necessary—military tool—must be used to stop the killing.

This brings me to a disturbing and shameful recent episode. For all the good the U.S. has done with humanitarian relief for the victims of Darfur—our government also appears committed to working with the perpetrators of the genocide.

It was recently reported that in April of this year, a U.S. government jet owned by the CIA flew Major General Salah Abdullah Gosh—the head of Sudan's intelligence agency—to Washington for meetings with high level CIA officials. This was a reward for his government's work with the U.S. on the war on terrorism.

The government of Sudan is officially designated a "state sponsor of terrorism." The government of Sudan has participated in the murder and terrorizing of tens of thousands of their own citizens. The women and children I met in the refugee camps were victims of the Sudanese government's terror.

It is beyond my belief that a senior official complicit in this terror, this genocide could be jettied to Washington with our tax dollars to be commended for his "counter-terrorism" efforts. This episode is offensive, a slap in the face to every survivor of this horrible ethnic cleansing

and is truly a betrayal of the value we share as Americans. A likely perpetrator of genocide should never be the dinner guest of our government.

As a superpower, as a free people, as a people who will generously reach out anywhere in the world to help people in need, we cannot be on the side of the victims and the murders at the same time. The terror the people of Darfur are experiencing every day must be the same War on Terror our Nation is fighting—those people's lives have value and it is wrong for the CIA or anyone else in Washington to sell them out.

Let me say in conclusion, that I respect and admire the courage, the determination and amazing spirit of the refugees I have had the privilege to meet and know—both in Minnesota and in Chad.

The struggle and journey to find peace, security, hope and opportunity is real for refugees and anyone forced to flee their home. This is exactly what all human beings seek in life. It is my hope and it will be my determined commitment to myself, the families I work for in Washington, and the women and children I met from Darfur, that our government work tirelessly to make sure there are fewer refugees, fewer displaced persons and much, much more peace, security, hope and opportunity over the next twenty-five years.

This is truly the world I hope we can build together.

INTRODUCTION OF THE TRUE REINVESTMENT FOR AMTRAK INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE 21ST CENTURY ACT

HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 20, 2005

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to be joined by Mr. NADLER and Ms. SCHWARTZ to introduce the True Reinvestment for Amtrak Infrastructure in the 21st Century Act, otherwise known as TRAIN-21, which would provide the true federal commitment to Amtrak that has been missing for too long.

Amtrak is currently under attack by people who don't recognize the tremendous benefits generated by intercity rail in this country. Not the billions of dollars generated in commerce, nor the thousands of businesses along the Northeast Corridor whose employees are dependent on Amtrak, nor the national security value of having an additional mode of transportation, nor the benefits to our environment by taking cars off the road. However, 25 million people did recognize those benefits and rode Amtrak in 2004, which was the 2nd straight year of record ridership.

Amtrak is crucial for more than just the businessmen who ride its trains along the Northeast Corridor. It is just as crucial for commuters who unknowingly are dependent on Amtrak's survival. Were Amtrak to go bankrupt, nearly 100,000 New Jersey commuters would be stranded, because over three-quarters of New Jersey Transit trains ride on track owned and maintained by Amtrak. And Amtrak is just as crucial for the people in rural Montana or Colorado, who depend on the train as their link to the national transportation system.

There is no question that Amtrak has its share of problems. But there are two ways to

address Amtrak's problems. The first is what we've been doing: blame Amtrak, blame labor, and keep cutting until the system becomes profitable. This method has been a failure. Keeping Amtrak on a starvation budget means maintenance can't be performed, the system can't be improved, and service deteriorates. This path leads to certain bankruptcy and the elimination of intercity passenger rail service in this country.

The people who prefer this method of cutting funding and raising expectations seem to forget a few simple truths: First, the reason Amtrak was created in the first place was because the railroads were hemorrhaging money on passenger service and begged the government to take it off their hands. Second, public transportation is not profitable. No public transit system in the country covers its operating expenses with passenger fares, and virtually no intercity passenger rail systems in the world turn a profit, either. The trains that we admire in Europe are supported yearly by large government subsidies. Third, no form of transportation pays for itself, including highways. But we subsidize them because they improve the quality of our lives. And that's what transportation is about. It's not just getting from one place to another. It's about creating jobs, revitalizing neighborhoods, stimulating commerce, redeveloping underutilized land, and making us more secure.

That's why I'm introducing this legislation today that will put us on the other path towards solving Amtrak's problems: Actually giving it the funding it needs to be successful. That means addressing the huge backlog of deferred maintenance on the Northeast Corridor, and establishing new funding mechanisms to improve rail service throughout the country. This idea has been tried recently, with tremendous success. In California, for example, a serious investment into train service by the State since 1998 has resulted in a near tripling of ridership and a doubling of revenues. They accomplished this with a simple formula: run more trains, run them faster, and run them on time.

This legislation would take that model and build on it. It establishes a Federal/State matching program for passenger rail, similar to what we do for highways and transit, and it provides a stable funding source that's not dependent on annual appropriations. It does this by establishing an independent corporation, the Rail Infrastructure Finance Corporation, which will sell bonds and invest the proceeds in a way to provide for a steady stream of income. The Corporation will select rail projects approved for funding by the Secretary of Transportation, and provide 80 percent of the necessary money, with the State, or consortium of States, providing the other 20 percent. And the money will be distributed in the form of contract authority good for 6 years, so States will be able to make firm long-term plans.

The Corporation will be authorized to distribute \$500 million in contract authority each year, with the bulk of that going to four corridors that have been identified by Amtrak as being "ready to go" for investment: A Southeast Corridor from Washington to Jacksonville; a Midwest Corridor radiating outwards from Chicago to Minneapolis, Detroit, and St. Louis; a Pacific Northwest Corridor from Eugene to Vancouver; and a California Corridor running along the Pacific coast and through the central

valley. Contract authority will also be distributed to states with other federally-designated high-speed corridors, states with long-distance Amtrak trains only, and states not served by Amtrak at all.

The goals of this program are simple: run more trains, faster, and on-time. This does not require using exotic technologies, and it does not require massive new investments. This is just a simple shift of philosophy. Instead of trying to pare Amtrak down until it becomes profitable, which would have the inevitable result of leaving us with no trains at all, we will expand it and improve it so that people begin to ride Amtrak in ever increasing numbers.

In addition, the bill reauthorizes Amtrak at a level of \$2 billion per year, the same level recently passed by the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which will go a long way towards addressing the \$5 billion in backlogged maintenance on the Northeast Corridor.

Just as important is what this bill does not do. It does not put the burden of paying for trains onto the already over-burdened States. It does not cannibalize Amtrak into different companies. It does not mandate the elimination of long-distance routes. And it does not harm the essential labor protections that cover rail workers.

I have heard some people say that rail is the past. An obsolete mode of transportation for a bygone time. I strongly disagree. In fact, I believe that rail could be the mode of the future. With rising gas prices and overcrowded highways and airports, we need alternative ways to get around. This legislation firmly establishes a true national commitment to intercity rail, and put Amtrak on a path towards lasting success.

HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE
OF SERGEANT ROBERTO
ARIZOLA, JR.

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 20, 2005

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the life and service of Sergeant Roberto Arizola Jr., who died serving his country as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Sgt. Arizola died on June 8th, 2005 in Baghdad when an improvised explosive device detonated near his vehicle. He was assigned to the Army's 297th Military Intelligence Battalion, 513th Military Intelligence Brigade, of Fort Gordon, Georgia. Roberto was awarded the Army Achievement Medal in 2000 for his extraordinary performance in operations "Joint Endeavor" and "Joint Guard" in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A superb soldier, Sgt. Arizola was an even better friend, husband, and father. Roberto was kind and loving, possessing a charismatic personality that brought joy to those lucky enough to share in his company.

Sgt. Arizola died a soldier, defending the lives of those unable to defend themselves. The father of a seven-year-old son, he died so that other families and other children might live. He gave up a safe life in a free country so that others might grow up in safety and freedom.

Sergeant Roberto Arizola gave his life to protect ordinary people from those who would

do them harm. He leaves behind him an example of extraordinary service and courage. He died a hero, and he deserves the thanks of a grateful nation.

IN HONOR OF THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF IRRELEVANT WEEK

HON. CHRISTOPHER COX

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 20, 2005

Mr. COX. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Andy Stokes, this year's 255th National Football League draft pick. The final pick of the NFL draft is a position of tremendous honor in my hometown of Newport Beach, California. For the past 30 years, the NFL Underdog has been treated to a week-long celebration in his honor. This annual tradition of Irrelevant Week was founded by my friend Paul Salata as an occasion for "Doing Something Nice For No Reason." Irrelevant Week XXX, which commences today, will celebrate "Mr. Irrelevant" Andy Stokes, a tight end from William Penn University in Iowa, who was chosen by the New England Patriots as the final pick in the 2005 NFL draft.

Though Andy Stokes may have been the final pick for the Patriots, the St. George, Utah native will be number one in Newport Beach as we use this occasion to celebrate the NFL Underdog and to recognize all former "Mr. Irrelevants" from the past three decades. Among the highlighted events for Irrelevant Week XXX are a welcoming party, grand banquet, and activities at various Southern California resorts. The fun and games will include a football game with Mickey and Goofy at Disneyland, a tailgate party at Angel Stadium before the Angels vs. Dodgers baseball game, and a visit to Hollywood Park with other NFL alumni for a day of horse racing action.

This special anniversary Irrelevant Week also serves as an opportunity to pay tribute to its 30 years of service to our community. Though Irrelevant Week is a lighthearted affair, over the years it has helped to raise over one million dollars for charities that help youth in both the academic and athletic arenas. This year, at the behest of Newport Beach Fire Chief Tim Riley, who serves on the Irrelevant Week steering committee, Irrelevant Week will be sending 15 to 20 children to special camps designed to lend emotional support and friendship to child burn survivors. Other beneficiaries of Irrelevant Week XXX include Costa Mesa United and Orangewood Children's Home.

Irrelevant Week has long been recognized by the NFL, ESPN and others in the sports world because it is a celebration of the underdog. Moreover, Irrelevant Week provides an opportunity for sharing community spirit and providing support for children in need. On behalf of the United States House of Representatives, I would like to commend Paul Salata and his family for founding and carrying on the tradition of Irrelevant Week for the past 30 years. I also ask my colleagues to join me today in congratulating Andy Stokes on his selection as "Mr. Irrelevant" and wishing him the very best for a long and successful career in the National Football League.