

years our Nation's passenger railroad has been treated as an unwanted stepchild. Year after year, Congress has shortchanged Amtrak. Even in the area of security, while we have enacted legislation protecting airlines from the threat of terrorist attacks, we have done virtually nothing to protect our railroad infrastructure and those who rely on it.

Amtrak has survived despite a severe lack of funding and an annual threat of elimination, which has conditioned Amtrak to focus on survival. Railroads throughout the world receive some government support to supplement the revenues paid by passengers. The Administration has not accepted this and every year proposes inadequate or no funding. A period of uncertainty follows, at the end of which Congress usually provides more than the Administration has requested, but sometimes less than Amtrak needs. I challenge anyone in this Congress to name one company who can develop and implement a 5-year capital and operating plan without knowing if they'll have any money for it the following year. That company would fail. That's not an option for Amtrak. It's our responsibility to ensure that Amtrak survives.

Without Amtrak, millions of passengers—many of who cannot afford to buy a plane ticket or for whom driving is impracticable—would be stranded. Without Amtrak, millions of travelers would be added to already congested roads and airports. Amtrak's 20,000 workers would be out on the streets looking for new jobs. Local economies and businesses that have benefited from Amtrak's service would suffer. States already under tight budget constraints would be forced to figure out how to pay for new service.

Without Amtrak, the Railroad Retirement and Unemployment programs, which cover employees of all railroads—freight and passenger—would be in dire straits. According to the Railroad Retirement Board, without the participation of Amtrak, employer and employee payroll taxes would need to be increased from the current 16 percent to 27 percent in 2027. Those tax increases, however, would ultimately be insufficient and serious cash flow problems for Railroad Retirement would begin in 2031.

Without Amtrak, cash reserves for the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account would be exhausted by 2006, and nearly \$297 million would have to be borrowed from the Railroad Retirement account to make up for losses. The Board informs me that ultimately Amtrak's unemployment benefit costs would be borne by other railroads.

Without Amtrak, the commuter operations that serve millions of passengers along the Northeast Corridor, Chicago, and the West Coast would halt. These operations, which include SEPTA in Philadelphia and New Jersey Transit, require the use of Amtrak infrastructure, such as catenaries. They also require the continuation of Amtrak's dispatching system.

Yet despite chronic underfunding, Amtrak has had its successes. Under David Gunn's leadership, Amtrak has improved operations in some markets and increased ridership to over 25 million passengers in 2004: an increase of one million passengers from 2003 and a new Amtrak record.

Ridership on short-distance routes in the West is up 11.7 percent. The Pacific Surfliner, serving Southern California, showed the largest increase in ridership, with a gain of 26.3

percent. Midwest trains experienced the next largest increase in passengers.

Amtrak has also made significant progress in rebuilding infrastructure and rolling stock after years of deferred maintenance. In Fiscal Years 2003 and 2004, 256,000 concrete ties were laid; 2,755 bridge ties were replaced; 266 miles of continuous welded rail were installed; 34 miles of signal cable were replaced; and 19 stations and 37 substations were improved.

Amtrak's mechanical department plowed full steam ahead. In 2004, it remanufactured 180 passenger cars; rebuilt 51 wrecked cars and locomotives; and made seven Superliner baggage modifications in passenger cars.

Excess equipment was sold, unprofitable services were eliminated, fares were lowered on long-distance routes to increase ridership, and a \$71 million maintenance facility was opened in a joint partnership between Amtrak and the State of California.

In short, Amtrak is making progress, even under a starvation budget. All of this progress would halt under the Administration's radical so-called "reform" schemes.

Our Nation's high-speed rail program is also on the Administration's chopping block. If the United States is serious about maintaining our status as the world's leader in transportation then we must tap into the potential of our rail system. Even with continuing investments in our highway and aviation systems, we can't depend on our highways and airports alone. We must strengthen our rail system by expanding its capacity and improving reliability for freight and passenger services.

I thank my colleagues, Chairman YOUNG, Subcommittee Chairman LATOURETTE and Ranking Member BROWN, for their dedication to rail and I look forward to working with them in moving these bills through the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee toward final passage.

CONGRATULATING MS. LINDA JONES ON RECEIPT OF THE 2004 PRESIDENTIAL AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE TEACHING

HON. JO BONNER

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Mr. BONNER. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride and pleasure that I rise to honor Ms. Linda Jones on the occasion of her being honored with the 2004 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

This award, established in 1983, recognizes outstanding science and mathematics teachers in grades K–12 in all fifty states and each of the four U.S. jurisdictions. This White House award is currently recognized as the nation's highest commendation for elementary and secondary math and science teachers. During this year's nomination process, 600 applications were submitted for this honor. Out of that tremendous number of nominations, Linda Jones was one of only 95 winners nationwide and one of only two from the state of Alabama.

Linda has been a distinguished member of the Baldwin County, Alabama, school system

for over 30 years. A native of Louisiana, she graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Southern Mississippi, and went on to earn a master's degree at the University of South Alabama. Additionally, she received an educational administration certificate from Alabama State University. During the course of her teaching career, she earned her National Board certification and in 2001 was awarded with Baldwin County's Teacher of the Year Award.

In an article which ran in the Mobile Register acknowledging this award, students and colleagues were interviewed and asked about the impact Linda has made in their lives and in the life of her school. To a person, each singled out her ability to challenge their limits and to achieve more than they could have possibly imagined. Moreover, she was recognized for going outside of the limits of her normal job description and work day to provide as many opportunities for her students as possible.

Mr. Speaker, there are few individuals more important to the development of our young men and women in this country than those who commit themselves to educating these children. Ms. Linda Jones is an outstanding example of the quality individuals who have devoted their lives to the field of education, and I ask my colleagues to join with me in congratulating her on this remarkable achievement. I know her colleagues, her family, and her friends join with me in praising her accomplishments and extending thanks for her many efforts on behalf of the schoolchildren of Baldwin County and the state of Alabama.

HONORING EARL WARREN MIDDLE SCHOOL AND TWIN OAKS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FOR BEING RECOGNIZED AS NATIONAL BLUE RIBBON SCHOOLS

HON. RANDY "DUKE" CUNNINGHAM

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to recognize that two blue ribbon schools in my 50th Congressional District of California are being honored as National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2004. These schools are:

Earl Warren Middle School, Solana Beach, CA. The principal is Dr. Jeanne Jones, and the superintendent of the San Dieguito Unified School District is Dr. Peggy Lynch.

Twin Oaks Elementary School, San Marcos, CA. The principal is Mrs. Carol Hayward, and the superintendent of the San Marcos Unified School District is Mr. Larry Maw.

There are over 100,000 public and private schools in the United States and only 300 are able to be recognized as a "National Blue Ribbon School" by the U.S. Department of Education, including the two above in California's 50th Congressional District, and 39 in the State of California. The No Child Left Behind—Blue Ribbon Schools Program honors public and private K–12 schools that either demonstrate dramatic gains in student achievement or are academically superior in their states. It recognizes schools that have at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance in accordance with

the state assessment systems. It also rewards schools that score in the top 10 percent on state assessments. The faculty and students at Earl Warren Middle School and Twin Oaks Elementary School have demonstrated strong leadership, clear vision and mission, excellent teaching and curriculum, policies and practices that keep their schools safe for learning, expanded involvement of families, and evidence that both schools help all students achieve high standards.

I am immensely proud of those involved whose outstanding and tireless work in the interest of better education has now been recognized through the National Blue Ribbon Schools program. This is particularly close to my heart, because, as a former teacher and coach, and as a father, one of my passions is improving education so that every American can have a fighting chance to achieve the American Dream.

And while these two schools in my district have now been recognized as National Blue Ribbon Schools, the real winners are all of the children, parents, teachers and citizens who have all been challenged through this recognition to successfully improve education in all of their local communities.

HONORING THE CONTRIBUTIONS
OF TRUSTEE JUSTIN R.
RODRIGUEZ OF THE SAN ANTONIO
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Mr. CUELLAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the exemplary public service of Justin R. Rodriguez, District 7 Trustee of the San Antonio Independent School District.

Justin R. Rodriguez, a long time Texas resident, was born in San Antonio in 1974. In addition to his current career in education, he also has extensive legal experience in both his own law practice and through his former job as Assistant District Attorney.

Mr. Rodriguez understands the needs of our community. As Trustee, his goal is to prepare our children for both higher education and for the future workforce. Setting out to help end teenage pregnancy, and working hard to improve high school graduation rates, Justin Rodriguez believes in our kids.

He is the recipient of numerous awards, most notably the Bruce F. Beilfuss Memorial Award for outstanding service to the University of Wisconsin Law School. Justin R. Rodriguez has also served as the President of the Jefferson Neighborhood Association.

Justin Rodriguez currently lives in San Antonio with his wife Victoria and three children: Miranda, Aidan, and Olivia.

It is an honor to recognize the hard work of Justin R. Rodriguez of the San Antonio Independent School District. His dedication to the education of our children will help to insure the futures of our youngest citizens.

COMMEMORATING THE CITY OF
MADISON HEIGHTS, MICHIGAN

HON. SANDER M. LEVIN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the City of Madison Heights, Michigan, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary of its incorporation as a city.

On January 17, 1955, the residents of the east side of Royal Oak Township voted for the incorporation of the City of Madison Heights and elected nine commissioners to draft a charter for the new city. The Charter Commission drafted its first charter within six months of incorporation. The draft charter was presented to the citizens at a June 6th election and was defeated. A Revised Charter was again presented to the citizens on December 6, 1955, and it was approved, becoming the tenth city government in South Oakland County. At that time, the 7¼ square-mile City was the second largest in South Oakland County. Madison Heights ranked as fifth-highest populated City in South Oakland County. The first City Hall was located at 26305 John R Road, the former township offices. On April 5, 1963, a new municipal building was constructed which is on the present location at 300 West Thirteen Mile Road.

The City of Madison Heights was named a "High Tech Hot Spot" by *Detroit Magazine*. Nestled in the heart of Automation Alley, the newest technology cluster in the United States, Madison Heights offers lifestyle and economic benefits to its residents. There are more than 1,300 commercial and industrial businesses and services within the City and the City is proud to have a majority of small businesses, as well as more than 100 major companies within its borders.

The Madison Heights City motto is "The City of Progress" and it's well deserved. Over 31,000 people call Madison Heights home and enjoy the many benefits of living in a full-service and forward-thinking community. The city leadership has been central to providing growth as well as maintaining a sense of community.

As the city of Madison Heights celebrates this auspicious occasion, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating its citizens as they celebrate the past and focus on the future.

BLINDNESS DOES NOT PREVENT
CHRISTIAN PEREZ FROM BECOMING
SPELLING BEE CHAMPION
OF IMPERIAL VALLEY!

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor the achievement of Christian Perez, an eighth grade student at Bill E. Young Middle School in Calipatria, a small city in Imperial County, California.

Christian, who is 14, recently participated in the first ever regional Scripps Howard Spelling Bee in Imperial County. As most are aware, the winner of the regional Scripps Howard Spelling Bee moves on to the nationals held

here in Washington, D.C. to face students from across the country.

To prepare for the Spelling Bee, contestants, like Christian, dedicate a large portion of their young lives to the Herculean task of memorizing and learning thousands of words, which in itself is worthy of Congressional recognition.

Despite stiff competition and some very tense moments, Christian won the regional Spelling Bee upon correctly spelling "synapse." The 170 people who were watching the Spelling Bee at the Southwest Performing Arts Theater in El Centro gave Christian a standing ovation.

When asked about the competition, Christian said, "she felt relieved as soon as the competition was over and . . . her only dilemma might be which sister to take to nationals in early June."

Christian's story, however, doesn't end there. Unlike other contestants, who had a wide assortment of dictionaries and word lists to review, Christian's preparation was a little more arduous, as all of her study materials had to be in Braille. Fortunately, Christian did not let lack of sight stand in her way of becoming the spelling champion of Imperial County!

INTRODUCTION OF THE "VICTIMS
OF CRIME FAIRNESS ACT"

HON. ROB SIMMONS

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 14, 2005

Mr. SIMMONS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of National Victims of Crime Week and to introduce legislation to help crime victims and their families.

The Victims of Crime Act, or VOCA, was a tremendous victory in the fight to aid those affected by crime. It established a trust fund composed of criminal fines, forfeited bail bonds, penalty fees and special assessments collected by the U.S. Attorney's Offices, U.S. Courts and Federal Bureau of Prisons. These dollars come from federal criminals, not from taxpayers.

Money from this fund is used for a variety of services such as crisis intervention, emergency shelter, emergency transportation, counseling, and criminal justice advocacy. There are approximately 4,400 agencies that depend upon VOCA to provide services to 3.6 million crime victims a year. Currently, VOCA is the only federal program that supports services to victims of all types of crimes including homicide fatalities, domestic violence, child abuse, drunk driving, elder financial exploitation, identity theft, rape, and robbery. These services are essential to helping people cope with their victimization and move on with their lives.

Sadly, a spending cap was installed on the VOCA trust fund. In fiscal year 2005, over \$800 million was deposited into the fund. Due to the spending cap, only \$620 million will be distributed to the states this year. While the balance of VOCA sits unused, state crime victim assistance programs struggle to remain fully funded. My legislation, the "Victims of Crime Fairness Act" would eliminate this spending cap and direct the money toward its original intention, helping victims of crime.