

of our country, and I am grateful to work with Louisiana HonorAir to salute them, the courageous men and women who stood to protect America.

This weekend 97 veterans from Southwest Louisiana will make the three hour flight to our Nation's capital. In Washington, D.C., the group will tour the WWII Memorial, Korean Memorial and Vietnam Memorial and attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. For many veterans in the group, it is their first time to tour the WWII Memorial because of its recent construction. Then, as quickly as they came, the group will return to a hero's welcome in Lafayette, Louisiana where family and friends will gather to show their appreciation one more time.

Having met many of these groups in Washington, I continue to be awestruck by the reactions of these men and women who stood up to tyranny in Europe and Asia. Many rarely talk about their service, instead, looking to happier times. However, in the company of others who nobly served, they are able to frankly discuss their experiences, share tearful stories and remember comrades missing or killed in action.

Since 2007, more than 800 Louisiana veterans participated in the HonorAir program. Its success is a testament to one man's vision—T.D. Smith. To demonstrate his appreciation to our veterans, T.D., a local radio host, started the program in January 2007 after learning of a similar effort in North Carolina. Smith began gathering sponsors and raising money needed to pay for the flights, buses and tours.

Corporal Earl Flatt, of Broussard, Louisiana, a combat veteran of Iwo Jima, said, "My faith in America was increased once again by the enthusiasm of the people of Acadiana, who embraced this project and made it all possible." Corporal Flatt was on the first HonorAir flight, and he remembered being at the WWII Memorial as one of the most rewarding days of his life. Referring to T.D., he said, "Mere words cannot express my appreciation for T.D. Smith. His enthusiasm, work habits and patriotism is never exhausted. He would have been a hell of a Marine."

T.D.'s leadership and commitment to this project and our veterans is extraordinary. His humble demeanor further highlights the contributions of the veterans, many whom are strangers before the flight, and belies the typical boisterous on-air radio personality many would expect. T.D. ensures the HonorAir program never fails to remember its mission of "celebrating Louisiana's own—their courage, their valor, their sacrifice in WWII."

In addition to T.D.'s vision, the success of the program depends on a myriad of fundraising and logistics. This program is truly a broad community effort, and volunteers throughout the Acadiana area who help raise funds, serve on the board of directors, and act as guardians on each flight, should all be commended for their tireless efforts. However, Linda Dautreuil and her mother Sallie Varrelman each stepped forward to pilot the efforts of others. Ensuring each veteran received attention to their specific details, this mother-daughter team serve each flight participant with care. They plan, organize, and implement each flight guaranteeing the experience of a lifetime for these worthy veterans. Linda's respect and admiration for these WWII heroes, and her wish to thank them for their

sacrifice, is evident in her commitment to this project. And, Sallie, with a soft British accent, is repaying a 70-year debt to the brave American soldiers she remembers stationed around her Boumemouth, England home as a 12-year-old in 1939.

T.D., Linda and Sallie each exemplify patriotism and service to our great nation as they honor those of the "greatest generation." One man, who accompanied his father-in-law on a Louisiana HonorAir flight last year, expressed the profound affect this extraordinary expression of kindness has on those who served so heroically.

He said, "one of the most memorable moments was when we were waiting for our bus to pick us up at the WWII Memorial. As usual, T.D. was walking around, joking and talking to the Vets as he smoked a cigar. My father-in-law took a deep breath and commented on how well it smelled. It was then that T.D. unselfishly offered him a cigar and a light. Well, Mr. Trahan thought he had won the lottery. T.D. gave him a cigar and light and stood there talking to him, making him feel like the most important person in the world."

Unfortunately, shortly after his flight, the man's father-in-law passed away. His story emphasizes the importance of honoring these veterans before it is too late.

Today, I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering the brave men and women who defended America and in commending Louisiana HonorAir, T.D. Smith, Linda Dautreuil, and Sallie Varrelman who convey our appreciation in such a remarkable way.

#### TRIBUTE IN HONOR OF NATIONAL TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK

#### HON. MICHAEL K. SIMPSON

OF IDAHO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 8, 2008*

Mr. SIMPSON. Madam Speaker, in recognition of National Teacher Appreciation week, I rise today to pay tribute to teachers across the country. It is always appropriate to thank those who devote their lives to the education of our Nation's children, but Teacher Appreciation Week gives us a special opportunity to remind educators that we support what they do and want to partner with them in the important work of preparing today's children to be tomorrow's leaders.

Every day, educators inspire, teach, and make a difference in our lives. Teaching is a challenging and rewarding job, and those who choose to undertake it deserve our respect and gratitude. It should be a priority for Congress to ensure that teachers have the tools they need to make a difference in the lives of their students, and I am pleased that my colleagues recently joined me in expressing their full support for America's educators by unanimously passing resolutions in recognition of National Teacher Appreciation week.

I am grateful for the positive impact that my teachers have had on my life, and I appreciate the work and dedication of our Nation's educators in teaching the future business leaders, farmers, and citizens of our country.

#### THE PASSENGER RAIL INVESTMENT AND IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2008 AND THE RAIL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION ACT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

#### HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 8, 2008*

Mr. OBERSTAR. Madam Speaker, together with Ranking Member MICA, Subcommittee Chairwoman BROWN, Subcommittee Ranking Member SHUSTER, and more than 30 other Members of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, I am pleased to introduce the "Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008" and the "Rail Infrastructure Development and Expansion Act for the 21st Century", or RIDE-21.

We are introducing these bills between two significant milestones in railroad history. One week ago today, Amtrak marked the beginning of its 38th year of operation on May 1. This Saturday, May 10th is National Train Day, marking the 139th anniversary of the "golden spike" being driven into the ground at Promontory Summit, Utah, in 1869. The "golden spike" bound the last tie connecting the last rail that united the Central Pacific Railroad with the Union Pacific Railroad, completing the transcontinental railroad.

These two milestones represent two different conceptions of passenger rail. The transcontinental railroad was born thanks to the support of President Abraham Lincoln. He, along with Civil War leaders, envisioned and planned the creation of the railroad. Not only did the completion of the railroad result in the ability to deliver goods and people across the country, it ultimately bound the east with the west, further unifying the country as the divide between the North and the South was beginning to mend. At the time, the transcontinental railroad brought a new sense of wonder and enthusiasm for discovery and entrepreneurship across the country.

In contrast, the formation of National Railroad Passenger Corporation, more commonly known as Amtrak, occurred at a time of waning support of intercity passenger rail. Amtrak was created after the freight railroads begged Congress to let them get out of the passenger rail business because it was not profitable.

Indeed, Amtrak inherited decrepit stations and terminals, passenger cars that offered dated amenities, and equipment prone to failure.

Thirty-seven years after the launch of Amtrak, America is on the threshold of a "renaissance" for intercity passenger rail that approaches the enthusiasm of the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Last year, Amtrak set a ridership record for the fifth year in a row, exceeding 25.8 million passengers. Its ticket revenues rose 11 percent to more than \$1.5 billion, the third straight year of revenue growth. This record of achievement is even more impressive considering that for the past eight years Amtrak has contended with an Administration committed to its bankruptcy.

Indeed, these achievements are occurring when there is a greater need than ever for alternatives to our congested highways and skies. To alleviate this congestion and

strengthen our energy security, we need to invest in intercity passenger rail. Amtrak removes almost eight million cars from the road annually and eliminates the need for 50,000 fully loaded, passenger airplanes each year.

Other countries already make an annual commitment to intercity passenger rail. In 2003 alone, France invested \$10.6 billion in its rail system; Germany invested \$12.4 billion; and the United Kingdom invested \$7.8 billion. Outside of Europe, Japan invests about \$2 billion annually to its Shinkansen and China has launched a plan to spend a total of \$162 billion from 2006 through 2010 to expand its railway system.

These investments have paid off: passenger rail accounts for 32 percent of Japan's transportation market; the Eurostar, the high-speed passenger train operator between Britain and mainland Europe, recently reported a 21.3 percent rise in passengers to 2.17 million between January and March 2008, compared with the same period last year, with a 25 percent increase in ticket revenues. Indeed, you can hardly purchase a plane ticket from London to Brussels or London to Paris because rail service is faster and easier than air service.

H.R. —, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 authorizes more than \$14.4 billion for Amtrak capital and operating grants, state intercity passenger grants, and high-speed rail over the next five years. The bill authorizes \$6.7 billion (an average of \$1.34 billion per year) to Amtrak for capital grants and \$3.0 billion (an average of \$606 million per year) for operating grants. Past inconsistent Federal support has hampered Amtrak's ability to replace catenaries, passenger cars, bridges, ties, and other equipment necessary for Amtrak to provide service. These capital grants will help Amtrak bring the Northeast Corridor to a State of Good Repair, procure new rolling stock, rehabilitate existing bridges, as well as make additional capital improvements and maintenance over its entire network. In addition, the operating grants authorized under the bill will help Amtrak pay salaries, health costs, overtime pay, fuel costs, facilities, and train maintenance and operations. These operating grants will also ensure that Amtrak can meet its obligations under its recently negotiated labor contract.

In an effort to encourage the development of new and improved intercity passenger rail services, the bill creates a new State Capital Grant program for intercity passenger rail capital projects, based on the New Starts transit capital program administered by the Federal Transit Administration. The bill provides \$2.5 billion (\$500 million per year) for grants to States to pay for the capital costs of facilities and equipment necessary to provide new or improved intercity passenger rail. The Federal share of the grants is up to 80 percent. The Secretary of Transportation would award these grants on a competitive basis for projects based on economic performance, expected ridership, and other factors.

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, established to develop a national transportation vision to address surface transportation needs for the next 50 years, recommends that the United States establish a high-speed rail network that spans the entire country. The bill authorizes \$1.75 billion (\$350 million per year) for grants to States and/or Amtrak to finance the con-

struction and equipment for 11 authorized high-speed rail corridors. The Federal share of the grants is up to 80 percent. The Secretary of Transportation would also award these grants on a competitive basis.

Many of Amtrak's service routes outside the Northeast Corridor suffer from poor service reliability and on-time performance because of freight traffic congestion. This congestion prevents Amtrak from retaining and attracting new ridership, and increases Amtrak's operating costs. The Department of Transportation Inspector General recently reported that if Amtrak achieved an 85 percent on-time performance outside the Northeast Corridor in fiscal year 2006, it would have saved Amtrak \$136.6 million, or almost one-third of its operating budget. Amtrak is required by law to have preferred access on freight corridors; however, freight railroads do not always comply with Amtrak's access rights. The bill addresses this problem by providing congestion grants to Amtrak and the States for high-priority rail corridors in order to reduce congestion and facilitate ridership growth.

Federal support of Amtrak was cut drastically in fiscal years 2000 and 2001, forcing Amtrak to assume a large amount of debt to stay in operation. Amtrak has aggressively targeted this debt, paying down \$600 million from fiscal years 2002 through 2007. Our bill helps Amtrak to take further steps to reduce its debt, authorizing \$345 million each year for debt service through FY 2013. This funding will allow Amtrak to focus its resources on improving existing services and making additional capital and operational improvements.

Finally, no Federal guidelines currently exist to mediate disputes between commuter rail providers and freight railroads over use of freight rail tracks or rights-of-way, nor is there a standard forum for negotiating commuter rail operating agreements. The bill establishes a forum at the STB to help complete stalled commuter rail negotiations, helping our rail network operate as efficiently as possible.

The Committee is also introducing, H.R. —, the "Rail Infrastructure Development and Expansion Act for the 21st Century", authorizing \$12 billion of tax-credit bonds and \$12 billion of tax-exempt bonds for high-speed rail corridors over the next 10 years. This legislation will be referred to the Committee on Ways and Means and I look forward to working with Chairman RANGEL and Ranking Member MCCRERY on this important initiative.

Amtrak and high-speed rail are essential to create the world's preeminent national transportation network.

I look forward to working with Members of the Committee and the House to pass these important bills.

#### SUPPORTING COMMEMORATION OF ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

**HON. JOHN J. HALL**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 8, 2008*

Mr. HALL of New York. Madam Speaker, I am pleased that I have the opportunity to rise today in strong support and commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Israel. It is an honor to be able to speak on behalf of a country born in the aftermath of tragedy, erected against

formidable odds, and yet has prevailed to become a beacon of hope and an example of the prevailing strength of liberty and freedom.

Israel was not simply established, it was built. It was built through the toil, strife and resolve of the Jewish people and upon the premise of hope—hope that even in the wake of the ashes of the holocaust, goodness can prevail. And indeed, as we commemorate Israel's 60th birthday, we can see that goodness has prevailed.

In many ways, the path of Israel has mimicked that of the United States. It is in no way perfect and makes its fair share of mistakes. However, it is part of the same experiment of democracy, and built upon the notion of a state becoming a light unto other nations. In our century, the partnership between Israel and the United States has conjoined to thwart the existence of terrorism, advance the frontiers of human knowledge, and make an indelible contribution to the human condition.

Madam Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to foster the United States' alliance and friendship with this great nation to join me in wishing Israel a very happy 60th anniversary.

#### IN HONOR OF ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

**HON. ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 8, 2008*

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 60th anniversary of Yom Ha'atzmaut—Israel's Independence Day, to congratulate the Israeli people on their significant accomplishment, and to celebrate the strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

As the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, I very much appreciate the important role that Israel plays in the world for the Jewish people. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel was created providing a new homeland and safe haven for those who most recently had survived the Holocaust and for Jews before and since who had been scattered throughout the world after a millennia of conflict, discrimination, and persecution.

I am proud that the United States was one of the first countries to recognize Israel. Today, the U.S.-Israel relationship continues to be strong. And I pledge to work with our trusted ally to pursue a stable and peaceful Middle East, which assures safety and security for the State of Israel.

In the quest for peace in the Middle East, the United States has no stronger partner than Israel. As the Middle East's only democratic country, Israel is an important example for other countries in the region. It has free elections, a free press, and protection of minority rights. It is a strong and vibrant democracy and a trusted friend.

Maintaining a democratic society has not been easy. Israel has endured neighbors that have attempted to wipe it off the map, and it continues to face threats from terrorist organizations which oppose Israel's existence and seek to disrupt any possibility of a peaceful coexistence for all people.

Even today as Israel seeks security within its borders and peace with its neighbors, radical extremists attack its citizens with daily