

involved in the American Legion Post 496. Dolores has served as model of active citizenship and public service to assisting our local veterans.

I ask my colleagues to rise in honor of Danny Plymesser and Dolores Tlaci. They have served as true models of the committed men and women who serve in the VFW and Ladies Auxiliaries.

AMTRAK TURNS THIRTY

HON. JAMES L. OBERSTAR

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 1, 2001

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, thirty years ago today, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) took over from the Nation's freight railroads the responsibility for providing intercity passenger train services in the United States. Passenger train services had fallen on hard times. The railroads had a common carrier obligation to provide passenger train service, but virtually all of them were losing money and wanted to rid themselves of what they saw as an unnecessary burden. Prior to the creation of Amtrak, it was the policy of many of the railroads to simply allow the service to deteriorate to the point where ridership was so sparse that the Interstate Commerce Commission would grant the carriers permission to discontinue the operation. Some of the railroads went beyond benign neglect and actively downgraded the service to discourage people from riding the trains.

The railroads were private, for-profit firms that saw passenger operations as little more than a drain on their income from carrying freight. After 1920, except for the World War II years, intercity rail passenger travel declined, as people shifted to air and auto to meet their intercity transportation needs. Passenger train travel declined not only relative to other modes, but absolutely as well. From being the dominant mode of intercity transportation in 1920, rail passenger service declined to relative insignificance by 1970. Less than one-half of one percent of intercity passenger transportation was made by rail. Many thought that the day of the passenger train was over, and that outside of a handful of operations in a few densely populated corridors, passenger trains were destined to join the stagecoach and the flatboat as relics of America's transportation history.

Fortunately, for America's traveling public, this was not to be the case. Congress passed the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 and created the National Railroad Passenger Corporation—popularly known as Amtrak. On May 1, 1971, most of the railroads still operating passenger trains turned over their equipment to Amtrak and the new company took over the responsibility for providing intercity passenger train service. From the outset, it was clear that the task of revitalizing the service would be daunting. Amtrak had to overcome years of railroad neglect and indifference.

The first thing that Amtrak had to do was to arrest the long-term decline in intercity rail passenger ridership. Despite being woefully undercapitalized and inheriting a fleet of passenger cars and locomotives that averaged more than 20 years old, Amtrak stemmed the

tide of traffic to the other modes and began the long and arduous task of rebuilding passenger train service in America.

Over the years, Amtrak has managed to replace and upgrade the car and locomotive fleets, rehabilitate many once dilapidated train stations, and introduce a variety of new services in an effort to keep people riding the rails. Congress has continued to provide both operating, and capital support for Amtrak, although the level of support has varied. Amtrak has never received the kind of public investment that the Nation's highways and aviation system's have received. In fact, the Corporation often has been starved for capital. Almost from the outset, Amtrak's opponents have pressured Amtrak to reduce its deficits, while at the same time they tried to cut its budget. From Roger Lewis to George Warrington, a succession of Amtrak's CEOs have pleaded for adequate funding. Rarely have those pleas been answered.

Nevertheless, many in the Congress have demanded that subsidies to Amtrak be eliminated, and the Corporation is now scheduled to achieve operating self sufficiency by the end of 2002. Amtrak has made great progress toward reaching that goal.

Back in 1971, many believed that Amtrak would be little more than a holding action until passenger trains disappeared forever. Instead, despite the obstacles, Amtrak has survived—survived the inadequate equipment and facilities with which it started life; survived the budget cutters, and survived the competition from low cost airlines. And now, in 2001, we see the wisdom of keeping in place intercity rail passenger service in the United States.

Today, our airports and highways are facing gridlock. Delays are rampant and there are real limits to simply pouring more concrete and asphalt for new highways and runways to solve our Nation's congestion problems. Intercity rail passenger service can now be a major part of the solution to our transportation congestion problems. Most recently, Amtrak has inaugurated its Acela train service in the Northeast Corridor, and for the first time Americans can experience high-speed rail travel similar to what the French, Germans, and Japanese have enjoyed for decades.

When the Acela trains are fully operational, Amtrak plans to capture 50 percent of the air-rail travel market in the Northeast Corridor, replicating its experience in the southern end of the Corridor between New York and Washington D.C. with its Metroliner service. Already, Amtrak is carrying a record number of passengers—22.5 million in 2000—and, as additional Acela trains come on line, Amtrak's ridership will increase further. Amtrak should be proud of what it has achieved.

In the near future, the gentleman from New York (Mr. HOUGHTON) and I will be introducing a bill that will help develop high-speed rail passenger service throughout the United States. The Secretary of Transportation has designated about a dozen high-speed rail corridors around the Nation that will be eligible for this funding. Amtrak currently serves these corridors, and in most cases its operations will provide the basis for building the high-speed operations.

By preserving our Nation's rail passenger service network through difficult times, Amtrak has set the stage for developing a national network of high-speed trains that can play a major role in relieving air and highway traffic

congestion. Not only then is Amtrak a vital link to our Nation's transportation history, it is indispensable to our transportation future.

ON PRESIDENT BUSH'S EDUCATION PROPOSAL

HON. JOHN J. LaFALCE

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 1, 2001

Mr. LaFALCE. Mr. Speaker, I want to share with my colleagues an outstanding article written by Linda Banas, an English teacher, a constituent, and a resident of Tonawanda, New York, regarding President Bush's education proposal. This article, which appeared in the April 24, 2001 edition of the Buffalo News, is response to the President's recent statements on National Public Radio that our children are trapped in schools that do not teach and will not change. Linda Banas's column appropriately points out that these accusations are groundless. She emphasizes that teachers across Western New York and throughout the nation are making extra efforts to ensure their students succeed both in and outside the classroom. Her thoughtful ideas and observations serve as a starting point from which to begin a national conversation on education, and I urge all of my colleagues to take the time to read the following article.

MY VIEW: BUSH'S INANE ACCUSATIONS WON'T IMPROVE OUR SCHOOLS

I am a teacher. I teach in a nice suburban high school. We have access to the Internet in every classroom. Most of the students go on to post-secondary education. The halls are calm and the students are polite and thoughtful.

Our district is not without problems, but we can handle them because the community has resources. I am truly thankful for the opportunity I have to focus on what I was trained to do—teach English. As I drive to work, I listen to National Public Radio. Recently, President Bush was talking about education. He said, "... children are trapped in schools that will not teach and will not change."

I tried to imagine the teachers and administrators the president says will not teach. I suppose Bush pictures them sifting around tables having morning coffee and planning their day. A kindergarten teacher would snicker as she says, "I know the whole alphabet, but I am not going to tell even one letter to those kids in my room." A second grade teacher would agree, "I know how to do long division, but I'm not going to teach them how to even do the first step."

Bush wants to be the education president. Does he really think some educators go to school to not teach? I know of a high school where the one set of books is chained to the desks so the kids cannot take them home to study. Why doesn't the president know this?

I know a school librarian who spends part of her paycheck on coats and shoes for children who don't have any, teaches gang members to write poetry, runs baby showers for young mothers who have nothing, and buys food every week for kids who are hungry after school. Why doesn't the president know this?

I know a teacher of eighth-grade English who has no novels and is allowed one ream of paper a month for her 160 students. I know about the hundreds of dollars she spends in the copy stores each year. I know a guidance