

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