

FLOOR STATEMENT BY  
CONGRESSMAN LES AGOIN  
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#### THE PIONEER COMES THROUGH

Mr. Speaker. Just two weeks ago, the Pacific Northwest lay crippled under sheets of snow and ice. Sudden storms whipped off the Pacific Coast and up the Columbia River Gorge, paralyzing towns and cities between Portland, Oregon and Walla Walla, Washington.

These communities would have been totally cut off from the rest of the state and country if it hadn't been for one trustworthy link that kept the lifeline open through the Columbia Gorge: the Amtrak Pioneer.

Not so long ago, this passenger train was among those proposed for elimination from the nationwide Amtrak system. The Pioneer runs between Salt Lake City and Portland once a day in each direction. When snow, creek ice storms and silver thaws -- events that are not infrequent in this part of Oregon -- make state and federal highways impassable, the only remaining passenger link through the Columbia Gorge is the Pioneer.

Former Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams was ready to call the Pioneer a dinosaur just a few months ago. That assessment proved to be at odds with figures showing a dramatic increase in Pioneer's popularity. Based on those figures, Congress granted the Pioneer a three-year reprieve. I have no doubt that even better days are ahead for the Pioneer. And I know several Oregonians who are thankful the Pioneer's wheels were still turning two weeks ago.

The train responded to distress calls from stranded communities by shipping in food and transporting the sick. In the absence of ambulances, the Pioneer transported a woman from Cascade Locks to Hood River for hospitalization. It answered another emergency in the case of an ill woman in the upriver city of The Dalles who needed medical treatment in Portland. The Pioneer also hauled grocery supplies and made special stops to pick up stranded travelers along the Gorge.

With highways buried under snow drifts ranging from five feet in Hood River to 14 feet at Multnomah Falls, trucks didn't have a prayer of making their usual runs.

Unless Congress had saved the Pioneer from forced extinction last fall, those communities would have felt far more than the pinch of cold winter storms. Amtrak was their only sustaining link.

Legislation shouldn't require examples such as this to justify the value of a service. In judging Amtrak's worthiness, the trade-off in situations such as the Oregon ice storm never lines up neatly with the profit margin; rather, the difference between service and no service in this case came down to lives saved or lives lost. If, for one, am thankful Congress listened to the arguments I and others presented to save this train.

January 1980 proved the wisdom of that decision. Oregonians from Portland to Pendleton look upon the Pioneer as something more than an alternative to the automobile; in troubled times, they know it can be a life saver. Two weeks ago, when nothing else was moving along the frozen Columbia Gorge, the Pioneer proved the aptness of its name. It came through.