Federal law enforcement personnel may retire with bull benefits after 20 years, while paying slightly more out of each paycheck for these increased benefits. While DS agents may currently retire at age 50 with 20 years of service, their annuity calculation is based on the smaller level of contribution.

My bill helps correct a basic matter of fairness. Diplomatic Security agents perform the functions of law enforcement officers, and they should receive the benefits associated with those responsibilities.

TRIBUTE TO THE QUBA INSTITUTE

HON. THOMAS M. FOGLIETTA

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 6, 1997

Mr. FOGLIETTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Quba Institute, which has educated members of Philadelphia's Muslim community since 1968. The institute offers varied forums of Islamic studies, such as lectures, classes, workshops, reading groups, day school, and Qur'an school. Students at the Quba Institute are encouraged to strive for overall academic excellence in addition to pursuing traditional Islamic scholarship. In order to achieve the optimal balance, traditional religious studies are paired with modern techniques to achieve a well-balanced academic experience.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the Quba Institute's record of producing rigorous scholarship and building character among its students, I hope my colleagues will join me in honoring this fine school on this day.

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1997

HON. DON YOUNG

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 6, 1997

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to introduce on Tuesday, February 4, along with our distinguished colleagues JOHN DINGELL, JIM SAXTON, and JOHN TANNER, the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997.

This measure, which is the product of several years of careful deliberation, would be the first comprehensive refuge reform legislation since the enactment of the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act of 1966. In fact, this is an improved version of the bill that the House of Representatives overwhelmingly adopted on April 24, 1996, by a vote of 287 to 138.

By way of background, it is important to note that the National Wildlife Refuge System is comprised of Federal lands that have been acquired for the conservation of fish and wildlife and offer recreational opportunities for millions of Americans. Totaling about 91.7 million acres, the System provides habitat for hundreds of species, including nearly 700 kinds of birds, 200 mammals, 250 reptiles and amphibians, and 200 kinds of fish. These refuge lands are not Federal parks, wilderness areas, or national marine sanctuaries. In fact, hunting and fishing occur on more than 95 percent of the total acreage of the System.

The first wildlife refuge was created at Pelican Island, FL, in 1903, by one of our Nation's most prominent sportsmen and conservationists, President Theodore Roosevelt. Today, the System has 511 refuges, which are located in all 50 States and 5 territories. These units range in size from the smallest of 1 acre at Mille Lacs National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota to the largest of 19.3 million acres in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. In the last decade, more than 80 refuges and approximately 4 million acres have been added to the System. Funding for refuge acquisitions comes from two primary sources: First, annual appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund; and second, the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which is funded from duck stamps and refuge entrance fees. In fiscal year 1995, $410.9 million was collected from our Nation's anglers and sport hunters.

While the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, authored by the distinguished gentleman from Michigan, JOHN DINGELL, has been a landmark law, there are many people who believe that this act is in need of modernization. For instance, there is no statutory list of purposes for the National Wildlife Refuge System, there is no statutory definition of what constitutes a compatible use of a refuge, refuges are not managed as a national system, fishing and hunting are arbitrarily prohibited on new refuge lands until governmental studies are completed, and there is no requirement to complete comprehensive conservation plans for any of the 511 refuges.

Under the terms of our new legislation, we have established for the first time a nationwide set of six purposes for our Refuge System. These purposes are: to establish a nationwide network of lands to conserve and manage fish, wildlife, and plants; to preserve, restore, and protect endangered and threatened species; to conserve and manage migratory birds, anandromous fish, and marine mammals; to allow compatible wildlife-dependent recreation, which has been defined as fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and environmental education; and to fulfill international treaty obligations.

Second, we have defined the term ''compatible use'' by using the language the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service incorporated into their operating regulations years ago. While a refuge manager will retain the power to determine what is a ''compatible use,'' this definition should provide the guidance needed to make the proper decision.

Third, wildlife-dependent recreation will be allowed to occur during the interim period after the land has been acquired, but before the implementation of a management plan, as long as the refuge manager determines that those activities are compatible.

The author of this ''open until closed'' provision is the Gentleman from New Jersey, Jim Saxton. It is an essential change because there are a growing number of Americans who are angry and frustrated over the Service's land acquisition process. These Americans have worked hard to protect certain lands, they have contributed millions of dollars to the purchase of refuge lands, and they have found, much to their dismay, that for no rational reason their favorite fishing spot is not off limits during open-ended periods of governmental studies.

Fourth, this legislation provides that fishing and hunting should be permitted unless a finding is made that these activities are inconsistent with public safety, the purposes of the specific unit, or are not based on sound fish and wildlife management.

Finally, the proposal requires the formulation of conservation plans for each of the 511 refuges within 15 years of the date of enactment. It is important for the public to know what kind of archeological, natural, or wildlife resources exist on these refuges, and the allowed public uses of these resources. This inventory has been a goal of the environmental community for many years.

While this is a brief overview of the provisions of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, there are a number of things that the legislation does not address. For instance, it:

does not permit or require hunting and fishing to occur on every wildlife refuge. These activities must be found ''compatible'' and must meet a three-part test. Fishing and hunting can only occur on refuges when consistent with sound fish and wildlife management practices, with the fundamental reasons the refuge was created, and with public safety;

does not affect Federal, State, or local water rights. This bill does not limit the ability of the Federal Government to secure water for a refuge;

does not facilitate nonwildlife-dependent uses such as grazing, farming, mining, oil and gas development, jet skiing, etc. As under current law, nonwildlife-dependent uses may continue to occur when compatible, and when the Fish and Wildlife Service lacks legal authority or sufficient ownership interest in the property to prevent them. But this bill does not mandate, enhance, or protect such uses;

does not increase or decrease the size of any of the 511 refuge units;

does not permit unapproved pesticides to be used by row farmers or anyone else in the Refuge System;

does not permit the commercialization of our Refuge System. To repeat, this bill makes only compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses a purpose of the system. They are clearly defined as fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and environmental education; and

does not limit the Fish and Wildlife Service's ability to acquire new refuge lands at existing refuges. In fiscal year 1998, the service will propose to spend millions of dollars to acquire additional new acreage for our Refuge System. Our bill will not delay, stop, or otherwise affect those acquisitions.

It is my hope that during the debate on this bill in the 105th Congress, we will witness an accurate portrayal of the true impact of the provisions of this proposal. It is time to stop the misrepresentation of this bill as an effort to require hunting on refuges and the commercialization of the System.

This legislation is supported by the American Archery Council, the American Sportfishing Association, B.A.S.S., Inc., the California Waterfowl Association, Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, International Bowhunters Organization, Masters of Foxhounds Association of America, Mzuri Wildlife Foundation, National Rifle Association, National Wild Turkey Federation, New Jersey Federation of Sportsmen, North American Waterfowl Federation, Quail Unlimited, Ruffed

Grouse Society, Safari Club International, Wildlife Forever, and the Wildlife Legislative Fund of America. It has also been endorsed by the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus, which has a membership of more than 200 Members of this body.

Finally, this legislation is an improvement over the President's Executive Order of March 25, 1996. While the Executive order contains nonbinding ''directives'' to the Secretary of the Interior, our legislation statutorily establishes six purposes for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Executive order is also deficient in that it does not stipulate that 511 individual refuge units should be managed as a national system or that conservation plans should be completed. Furthermore, like all Executive orders, it suffers from the inherent problem that unlike statutory law, it can be easily modified, replaced or ignored by future administrations.

Mr. Speaker, our Nation's Wildlife Refuge System must be managed more effectively in the future. This System needs to have a statutory list of purposes, uniform guidelines to determine what activities are permissible, comprehensive conservation plans, and the enthusiastic support of the American people who finance this System with their hard earned tax dollars.

These are the goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. It is a sound piece of conservation legislation that reaffirms the legacy of President Theodore Roosevelt and the vision of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966.

I would urge my colleagues to join with me, JOHN DINGELL, JIM SAXTON and JOHN TANNER in this important effort to improve our National Wildlife Refuge System. This legislation will ensure that this system is alive and well for all our constituents for many years to come. It is interesting to note that the year 1997 has been designated as the ''Year of the National Wildlife Refuge System''. It would, therefore, be fitting to enact the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act this year.

THE HIGHWAY RAIL GRADE CROSSING SAFETY FORMULA ENHANCEMENT ACT

HON. PETER J. VISCLOSKY

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 6, 1997

Mr. VISCLOSKY. Mr. Speaker, today, I am pleased to introduce the Highway Rail Grade Crossing Safety Formula Enhancement Act, which is designed to provide a more effective method of targeting available Federal funds to enhance safety at our Nation's most hazardous highway rail grade crossings. This bipartisan legislation, which is the companion bill to legislation sponsored by Senators Lugar and Coats, will provide a more effective method of targeting available Federal funds to enhance safety at our Nation's most dangerous highway rail crossings.

Specifically, this bill would improve the Federal funding formula to account for risk factors that identify which States have significant grade crossing safety problems. The factors considered in the bill include a State's share of the national total for public highway rail grade crossings, its number of crossings with passive warning devices, and its total number of accidents and fatalities caused by vehicle-train collisions at crossings.

The Rail-Highway Crossing Program, also known as section 130, currently provides States with crossing safety funds as part of a 10 percent set-aside in each State's Surface Transportation Program [STP] funds. The program's goal is to provide Federal funds for State efforts to reduce the incidence of accidents, injuries, and fatalities at public railroad crossings. The States use these funs to build underpasses and overpasses, install passive or active warning devices, and improve pavement surfaces and markings.

Several hundred people are killed, and thousands more injured, every year in the United States as a result of vehicle-train collisions at highway rail grade crossings. A significant number of these accidents occur in rail-intensive States, such as Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Kansas, and Texas. More than one quarter of the Nation's 168,000 public highway rail grade crossings are located in these five States. One third of deaths caused by vehicle-train collisions nationwide between 1993–95 occurred in these states.

With 6,587, my home State of Indiana ranks fifth in the Nation for the number of highway rail grade crossings, and Indiana is annually among the top five States nationwide in terms of accidents and fatalities caused by vehicle-train crashes. Just 2 weeks ago, a 15-year-old boy from Valparaiso, IN was struck by a train while traveling to school. Several years ago, my own mother, fortunately, survived a vehicle-train collision at a crossing where there were no warning devices. This legislation will help prevent senseless accidents like these.

Maximizing the return from Federal funds requires that they be targeted to areas with the greatest risk. In a 1995 report to Congress on the status of efforts to improve railroad crossing safety, the General Accounting Office [GAO] found anomalies among the States in terms of the funds they received in proportion to three key factors: Accidents, fatalities, and total crossings.

With the legislation I am introducing today, we have a unique opportunity to maximize existing resources, improve safety at highway rail grade crossings, and save lives. The establishment of a new funding formula is an innovative step in that direction. By targeting funds to States on the basis of risk factors, we can put scarce resources to work and use a commonsense approach by allocating Federal dollars where the need is greatest. This legislation does not call for new Federal spending, but rather a more equitable and effective distribution of existing highway funds to states to enhance safety at dangerous highway rail grade crossings.

States that would benefit under the revised formula are: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin.

Finally, I would point out that my bill addresses the grade crossing safety problems by refining a key provision of the existing Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act [ISTEA]. Using my proposal as a foundation, I will work with my colleagues to help assure that Congress passes highway reauthorization legislation that makes the best use of available Federal resources for rail crossing safety. In the 104th Congress, I introduced a similar measure, in conjunction with the entire Indiana delegation, which I testified in support of last July during Surface Transportation Subcommittee hearings regarding ISTEA policy. I believe that continued emphasis on finding new and better ways to target existing resources to enhance safety at highway rail grade crossings will contribute to the overall effort in Congress and in the States to prevent accidents and save lives.

THE FEDERAL OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION ACT

HON. RODNEY P. FRELINGHUYSEN

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 6, 1997

Mr. FRELINGHUYSEN. Mr. Speaker, today, I am introducing important legislation that I hope will further our efforts to preserve land and open space.

I believe that our current tax law discourages individuals from conserving land, and our estate tax structure sometimes provides the financial incentive to sell land for the purpose of development, rather than maintain or donate land for conservation purposes.

The legislation that I am introducing today, the Federal Open Space Acquisition and Preservation Act, will credit the value of land donated to a Federal agency, for conservation purposes only, against the estate taxes owed on the property. This will create an incentive, absent before, for heirs to donate undeveloped land to the Federal Government, rather than choose the route of selling to developers.

As many individuals who live in the northeastern metropolitan areas know, the amount of open space is dwindling each day. However, there is some beautiful undeveloped land that needs to be preserved as such. I believe that this legislation will provide the incentive to maintain those open spaces.

I urge my colleagues support for this legislation.

ST. JOSEPH'S SCHOOL OF WEST ORANGE 40TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. BILL PASCRELL, JR.

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 6, 1997

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention the 40th anniversary of St. Joseph's School of West Orange, NJ. I am very proud to have a school of this caliber in my district, and I am thrilled to play a part in honoring this institution.

St. Joseph's Church was established in 1931, with it's first pastor being Monsignor Thomas Glover. In 1955, due to the very popular and well-attended CCD and Catholic Youth Organization programs, the decision was made to construct a school. In the fall of 1956, St. Joseph's School opened with a nine-room building for eight grades and a Kindergarten. The initial enrollment of 165 students doubled by November 1959. St. Joseph's School became an important part of the community, with nearly 95 percent of the parents belonging to the parents-teacher guild. The