If you are taking early retirement, check out the documents concerning its terms. Special promises made in such deals can override other plan documents.

And don't be shy about protecting yourself. If you can negotiate a personal promise of health insurance for yourself and/or dependents in retirement, do it. If your company is anxious to see you go, it may well agree.

Talk to experts as well. If you're in a union, officials there can be helpful. Or you may want to run the material by a labor lawyer. There's a lot of money at stake.

Free copies of the Labor Department bulletin are available from the Pension and Welfare Benefits Administration's publication hotline at 202–219–9247. It's also on the World Wide Web, at http://www.dol.gov/dol/pwba/.

POW/MIA RESTORATION ACT

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 9, 1997

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the POW/MIA Restoration Act. Last year, this body secured a victory for U.S. service personnel, their families, and the families of POW/MIA's by winning the passage of H.R. 945, the Missing Service Personnel Act.

H.R. 945 received unanimous support in the House as part of the Department of Defense Authorization Act of 1996.

Unable to prevent the passage of H.R. 945, the opponents of the legislation waited until last summer to attach a Senate amendment to the 1997 Defense Authorization Conference Report. That amendment essentially tore the heart out of the Missing Service Personnel Act.

In response, along with other supporters of our Nation's POW/MIA's, I introduced H.R. 4000, which would have restored the provisions which were stripped out by the Senate amendment. Unfortunately, while H.R. 4000 was passed unanimously by the House, it fell victim to the procedural rules of the Senate which were skillfully used by the bill's opponents to ensure that it was not taken up for consideration before Congress adjourned.

The POW/MIA Restoration Act would restore the provisions stricken from the Missing Service Personnel Act by the Senate amendment.

The first provision to be restored requires that military commanders report and initiate a search for any missing service personnel within 48 hours, rather than 10 days as proposed by the Senate amendment. While current regulations require local commanders to report any individual missing for more than 24 hours, such missing often fall through the cracks, especially during military operations.

The second provision covers missing civilian employees of the Defense Department. These civilians are in the field under orders to assist our military, and deserve the same protections afforded our men and women in uniform.

The third provision to be restored states that if a body were recovered and could not be identified by visual means, that a certification by a credible forensic authority must be made. There have been too many recent cases where misidentification of remains has caused undue trauma for families.

Finally, H.R. 4000 would restore the provision which would require criminal penalties for any Government official who knowingly and willfully withholds information related to the disappearance, whereabouts, and status of a missing person.

Prompt and proper notification of any new information is essential to the successful investigation of each POW/MIA case. This cannot be achieved if individual bureaucrats deliberately seek to derail the process.

The opponents of the Missing Service Personnel Act have to this day never offered any credible reasons for their opposition to the legislation. Rather than create more redtape I believe these provisions will help streamline the bureaucracy and improve the investigation process.

Moreover the Missing Service Personnel Act has not been public law long enough to be adequately evaluated. To repeal provisions of a law after 5 months does not make sense, especially when that law has not yet had a chance to be tested.

Accordingly, I urge my colleagues today to join me in supporting the POW/MIA Restoration Act.

MILTON BERGERON, A MAN OF HEART AND SOIL

HON. JAMES A. BARCIA

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 9, 1997

Mr. BARCIA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Milton Bergeron, who successfully combined teaching and conservation practices, his two passions, to make an important impact on the conservation efforts in Arenac County.

Milton is retiring from the Arenac Soil Conservation District Board after serving for 13 terms or 39 years. Elected to the Arenac Soil Conservation District Board in 1958, Milton has held the position of chairman, vice chair, secretary, and treasurer. While serving on the board, he taught and shared his knowledge of conservation with farmers, students, and teachers.

Born in Sterling, MI, Milton began his career in Holly, MI. he moved to Clintonville where he taught at School House Lake before becoming the principal of Waterford. He enjoyed teaching and working with young people, but his real love was farming. He bought his first 40 acre parcel and never stopped teaching, by sharing with other farmers conservation practices, he utilized in his own farming operation.

He founded an education program for the Arenac Conservation Board to help young people understand the importance of preserving high quality water and soil. Meeting with several teachers in the area, they started programs such as the annual poster contest now in its 30th year, the annual Arbor Day celebrations and taking fifth graders on an annual tour since the early 1970's.

Milton's dual passion for education and conservation fueled him to work with local teachers and the Department of Agriculture to sponsor a soil judging contest for high school students. Also wanting to recognize the teachers who were promoting conservation efforts in their classrooms, Milton presented a teacher of the year award at the district's annual meeting. Although Milton will continue to farm part time and participate in 4–H, church and community service.

Milton could not have been such an integral part of educating and promoting conservation efforts without the support of his wife, Lela, who he married in 1940 and his son and daughter-in-law, Ron and Mary Bergeron and his daughter and son-in-law, Ronella and Ron Berlinski.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, Milton is a leader in his field—educating people of all ages on the importance of conservation efforts. His generous contributions over the years should be applauded and I commend Milton Bergeron for his many accomplishments.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PATENT SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACT

HON. HOWARD COBLE

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 9, 1997

Mr. COBLE. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to introduce an updated version of legislation originally drafted in the last Congress by two former members of the Judiciary Committee who have since retired, Carlos Moorhead and Pat Schroeder. Many of us were cosponsors in the 104th Congress, including our distinguished chairman, Mr. HYDE, and ranking member, Mr. CONYERS. Original cosponsors of this bill include Mr. GOODLATTE, a senior member of the Subcommittee on courts and Intellectual Property, Mr. CONYERS, and Ms. LOFGREN, also a member of the subcommittee.

This legislation is necessary to allow American businesses to compete effectively in markets today and into the 21st century. The United States is by far the world's largest producer of intellectual property. This success is of course due to the great creativity of our citizens, but this success is also the direct result of a rational and sound policy of protecting intellectual property—a system that encourages the development of new inventions and processes. However, America does not have a monopoly on creativity. Many other nations have learned from our success—America no longer stands alone in its commitment to a strong system of patent protection for its inventors, small businesses and industries. Consequently, it is more important now than ever that we adopt certain reforms that will ensure that America maintains its position as the world leader in the production of intellectual property.

Under current law, foreign companies enjoy certain benefits in America that American companies do not enjoy in their countries, like the advantages of publication and prior user rights; the changes proposed today are especially useful for small businesses—many of which simply will not survive if foreign competitors continue to operate on a tilted playing field in America.

This legislation will benefit American inventors and innovators and society at large. First, by providing more efficient and effective operation of the Patent and Trademark Office; second, by furthering the constitutional incentive to disseminate information regarding new technologies more rapidly; third, by guaranteeing that patent applicants will not lose patent term due to delays that are not their fault;