wage and unemployment data to HUD and housing authorities, but not to owners or managers. This program was somewhat successful, but it expired in October 1994.

Then in 1993, Congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. It contained a provision which permits the Social Security Administration [SSA] and the Internal Revenue Service [IRS] to disclose earned and unearned income data to HUD. However, and this is very important, it did not provide for the redisclosure of income data to those local entities who directly service and oversee the tenants.

This particular program was first implemented in 1996 and matches information reported by the tenant with earned and unearned income reported to the SSA and IRS. If a discrepancy exists, HUD notifies the local housing authority that a particular tenant has underreported their income, but HUD is prohibited from disclosing how much the discrepancy is or where it exists. Thus, the local housing authority must launch their own investigation or have the tenant voluntarily disclose the information, despite the fact HUD has the information they need. HUD also informs the tenant, requesting he or she redisclose to the housing agencies their true income. Unfortunately, the individual must voluntarily do this and without giving local entities the information already complied the true effectiveness of this program will be diminished.

As you can see, steps have been taken to fight those who abuse the system, but the final step still remains. The Public Housing Tenant Integrity Act of 1997 builds on this foundation by making it possible for HUD to share the information it has to local housing agencies. Allowing local agencies to receive this information is a logical step, and it makes perfect sense. After all, local agencies are on the front line and work with public housing tenants every day.

One area of concern with computer matching is preventing the illegal disclosure of Federal tax data. However, safeguards currently exist between, and I believe we can develop further safeguards to protect the interests of all those involved including Congress and the IRS. Moreover, I believe Congress has an obligation to the taxpayer that public housing assistance is a benefit not a right.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is designed to stop individuals who defraud the government of hundreds of millions of dollars annually. We have the technology to fight this fraud and abuse and passage of the Public Housing Tenant Integrity Act is needed to provide local housing authorities with the necessary tools to do just that. I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to pass this commonsense legislation.

LEGISLATION TO ELIMINATE MISMANAGED HUD PROGRAM

HON. RICHARD H. BAKER

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 1997

Mr. BAKER. Mr. Speaker, recent allegations involving fraud in the Single Family Homes for Homeless Initiative and the mismanagement of the program by the Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD] in New Orleans—in particular, the division of Community Planning and Development—have fueled concern over abuse of taxpayer assets.

After significant investigation, I introduced H.R. 4085 in the 104th Congress, a bill to eliminate the program. Two other Subcommittee Chairmen of the House Banking Committee—SPENCER BACHUS of the Subcommittee on General Oversight and RICK LAZIO of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity—cosponsored the legislation with me. The bill effectively shuts the program down and returns the homes to taxpayers.

We introduce the same bill today to continue our efforts in the 105th Congress to overhaul the program for those most in need of hosing and to eliminate fraud and mismanagement in the Federal Government.

Earlier this year, I contacted the Inspector General of HUD, an independent office designed to oversee the department, and requested a comprehensive investigation of Safety Net, Inc., and its participation in the homeless program. In addition, I requested a full investigation of the HUD Office in New Orleans, particularly Community Planning and Development.

The program is more accurately described as the Homes for Homeless Initiative of the Single-Family Property Disposition Program. Here is how the program works: If a person defaults on the mortgage payments of his/her home and the home has an insured mortgage by the Federal Housing Administration [FHA], then the Federal Government becomes the owner of the home. In other words, in case of default, HUD pays the mortgage to the bank, acquires the property, and is required to dispose of it.

For most of these acquired properties, HUD leases the properties to nonprofits to serve homeless persons. An acquired property is leased to a nonprofit for $1 a year for up to 5 years. The home is to be provided for those persons who are homeless. One major restriction is that the tenant must have an income that is 50 percent of the median income (in Baton Rouge $19,146 for a family of four).

The nonprofit can purchase the home at any time for 10 percent below the appraised fair market value, as established at the time the $1 lease is signed. It is possible to sell the home well below present market value 5 years after the initial appraisal. A nonprofit is restricted from reselling to anyone other than a low income homebuyer (defined at $31,450 for a family of four).

The Sunday Advocate alleges that Safety Net, Inc., violated many of the rules of the homeless disposition program. In addition, it may have broken some of the laws required to participate in the program. I have requested that the investigation answer these allegations.

It is also alleged that the HUD Office in New Orleans failed miserably to monitor the program and the participation by Safety Net, Inc., for 5 years. I have asked the Inspector General to investigate the HUD Office as well.

Moreover, the U.S. Attorney's Office in Baton Rouge has responded to the case by opening an investigation to determine whether a criminal prosecution is warranted. The U.S. Attorney's Office is working in concert with the Inspector General's Office.

As a senior member of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity, I have long been an advocate of reform of the HUD acquired Single-Family Property Disposition Program. In 1992, I sponsored an amendment and passed into law a requirement that HUD must try first to sell the property in the private market to the highest bidder. I believe that our first priority is to recover as much taxpayer money for the acquired home. If we cannot sell the property to maximize taxpayer return, we should use our acquired properties in the most effective manner possible to house our most disadvantaged citizens without a home.

To continue rigorous oversight of this program, I requested that the Banking and Financial Services Committee conduct a hearing on this case and other abuses of this program to guarantee that we do not waste taxpayer monies and to insure we provide for our most needy citizens. Chairman BACHUS has travelled down to Baton Rouge and together, we conducted an oversight hearing in Louisiana on August 24.

I am committed to prosecuting fraud and reforming our Federal Government. Moreover, I believe we can provide a safe, decent home for our most underprivileged citizens while maintaining accountability for taxpayers.

GAS TAX RESTITUTION ACT OF 1996

HON. NICK J. RAHALL II

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 1997

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, today I along with Representative TOM PETRI are reintroducing legislation we sponsored during the last Congress to transfer to the highway trust fund revenues received from the 4.3 cents of the Federal motor fuel tax that is currently going to the general fund.

Many of us concerned with our surface transportation infrastructure were troubled when in 1993 this tax of 4.3 cents per gallon of motor fuel was imposed not for the purpose of bolstering receipts into the highway trust fund, but for the purposes of deficit reduction.

As we all know, the basic premise of the Federal motor fuel tax is that it is a user fee collected for the express purpose of making improvements to our road and highway infrastructure. It is one of the few taxes where Americans can see an immediate and direct result for having to pay it as they drive on the Nation's highways.

Last year we debated repealing the 4.3 cents-per-gallon tax. At the time, I offered an alternative. Restore it to the highway trust fund. Today, I do so again.

Few, if anyone in this body, can say that the areas they represent do not require road and highway improvements. The legislation I am introducing today will not only restore faith with the American people on the uses of the Federal motor fuel taxes, but will certainly assist in making needed surface transportation enhancements.

I would note that as introduced, this legislation would dedicate the entire 4.3 cents-per-gallon tax to the highway trust fund, and would not earmark any portion of this amount for mass transit, or for that matter, for any proposed new area of eligibility such as for Amtrak. This is not to say that I am necessarily opposed to the use of some portion of the 4.3 cents-per-gallon tax for these purposes and

policy decisions of that nature can certainly be made during further consideration of this legislation.

IN HONOR OF TRIDENT PRECISION MANUFACTURING, INC.

HON. LOUISE McINTOSH SLAUGHTER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 1997

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay special tribute to a distinguished company located in New York's 28th Congressional District: Trident Precision Manufacturing Inc.

President Clinton and Commerce Secretary Mickey Kantor honored Trident on December 6, 1996, by awarding it the 1996 Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for Small Business. The Baldrige Award, which highlights customer satisfaction, workforce empowerment, and increased productivity, is given annually to companies that symbolize America's commitment to excellence. No company could be more deserving of this award than Trident Precision Manufacturing.

Trident manufactures precision sheet metal components, electro-mechanical assemblies, and custom products. It has grown from a 3 person operation at its founding in 1979 to an employer of 167 people at its facility in Webster, NY today.

Between 1991 and 1995, Trident's employees submitted more than 5,000 process-improvement recommendations—and Trident's management implemented 97 percent of those ideas. It is a testament to Trident's workers and management that over that 5-year period, Trident made significant gains in productivity, efficiency, customer satisfaction, sales, and profitability. Sales per employee jumped 29 percent, time spent on rework decreased nearly 90 percent, and customer complaints fell by 80 percent. Defect rates have fallen so consistently that Trident now offers a full guarantee against defects in its custom products. In 1995, Trident's five major customers rated the quality of Trident's products at 99.8 percent or better. The company has never lost a customer to a competitor.

I am delighted that President Clinton and Commerce Secretary Kantor chose to recognize Trident for its strong record of quality and its excellent business performance. This award was a result of Trident's exceptional commitment, not only to the company's bottom line, but to its employees and customers. Trident's efforts to train and reward its workers are to be particularly commended. Since 1989, Trident has invested an average of 4.4 percent of its payroll on training and education. This is a remarkable investment for a small company, and two to three times above the average for all U.S. industry.

Trident represents the very best in American business: putting its customers first, trusting its employees, building quality into products and services, and being responsible corporate citizens. I am proud of Trident's success, its achievement, and of the contribution it makes to our community. Congratulations to everyone at Trident who shares in this honor.

INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW WILDLIFE REFUGE AUTHORIZATION ACT

HON. DON YOUNG

OF ALASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 1997

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Speaker, I am today introducing the New Wildlife Refuge Reauthorization Act of 1997.

By way of background, our National Wildlife Refuge System is comprised of 91.7 million acres of Federal lands that provide essential habitat for hundreds of species and offer recreational opportunities for millions of Americans.

The first wildlife refuge at Pelican Island, FL, was created in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt signed an Executive order setting aside three acres of land as a preserve and breeding grounds for native birds. 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 less than 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 new refuges have been added to the system.

The vast majority of our Nation's 511 refuge units were created administratively. In fact, less than 70 refuges have been designated by Congress. The authorizing committees, therefore, have had little, if any, input in the establishment of the other 460 refuges, which include the 192,493-acre Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, the 254,400-acre Hawaiian Island National Wildlife Refuge, and the 572,000-acre Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada. These Executive orders have set aside a huge amount of privately owned lands.

Under current law, funding for refuge acquisitions comes from two primary sources: No. 1, annual appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund [LWCF], and No. 2, the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, which is financed from the purchase of a yearly duck stamp and refuge entrance fees.

In the past, more than $1 billion in taxpayer money has been appropriated from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to acquire lands that become additions to existing units or entirely new wildlife refuges. This represents a substantial expenditure of money by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] without adequate input by Congress.

By contrast, the Migratory Bird Commission, whose membership includes four bipartisan Members of Congress, regularly meets to evaluate and decide how Migratory Bird Conservation Fund will be spent. Under normal conditions, a Governor of a State, after consulting with local citizens, will recommend that a new refuge be created or that additional land be added to the system. It is a process that has worked effectively for a number of years.

Regrettably, the checks and balances that exist on the uses of the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund simply do not exist in the allocation of money from the LWCF. Therefore, lacking such a review mechanism, we have a responsibility to carefully examine the recommendations of the USFWS and, if we so choose, to legislatively create any new wildlife refuge using LWCF money in the future. This is an essential change.

Under the terms of the New Wildlife Refuge Reauthorization Act, no funds could be expended from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to create a new refuge without prior congressional authorization. This bill does not affect any land additions to the existing 511 wildlife refuges or those created with money from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund.

Mr. Speaker, Congress must have a more meaningful role in the acquisition of hundreds of acres of new Federal lands. We should authorize new wildlife refuges just as we authorize new flood control projects, highways, national parks, scenic rivers, and weapons systems. After all, we are talking about the expenditure of millions of taxpayers dollars. Furthermore, at a time when the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a $440 million backlog of unfinished wildlife refuge maintenance projects, a comprehensive review of the service's priorities is appropriate.

I urge the adoption of the New Wildlife Refuge Authorization Act and want to thank our distinguished colleague from California, RICHARD POMBO, for his leadership in this important effort. By enacting this legislation, we will ensure that private property owners and their tax dollars are more adequately protected in the future.

SUPPORT THE POSTAL CORE BUSINESS ACT

HON. RANDY ''DUKE'' CUNNINGHAM

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 7, 1997

Mr. CUNNINGHAM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my colleague from San Diego, Mr. HUNTER, in introducing the Postal Core Business Act of 1996. This legislation, which is similar to H.R. 3690 from the 104th Congress, will prevent the U.S. Postal Service [USPS] from unfairly competing with a small business industry, known as Commercial Mail Receiving Agencies [CMRA]. The livelihoods of those who own and operate small commercial packing stores throughout the country, like Mail Boxes Etc. and Postal Annex, are threatened.

More than 10,000 CMRA businesses may be forced to close their doors due to the USPS' tax-free expansion into services already provided by private packaging stores. These expanded services include wrapping, packaging, and shipping of items, and the USPS may expand beyond that. The USPS is opening stores throughout the country, many in locations very near private companies who already provide these services.

The fact is that the USPS is not a fair competitor with private enterprise. The USPS is not forced to charge State or local tax on retail items, it is insured by the Federal Government, and it often does not pay the same Federal, State, and local taxes that private companies must pay. These are only some of the advantages enjoyed by the USPS, creating a playing field tilted against private industry. Moreover, when a customer brings an item to be packaged by the USPS, the USPS requires that the customer send the package through U.S. mail. Commercial mail companies do not require this of their customers.