are making it difficult for heirs to hold onto family farms and small businesses. I believe that it is time to take action to reform the estate tax so that it will be easier for family farmers and small business owners to pass their operations on to their children.

The Family Business Preservation Act is a targeted tax exclusion that is designed to have the biggest possible impact on family business owners with the smallest possible impact on the Federal Treasury. The bill would exclude the first $1.2 million of value in a family-owned business interest from a decedent's estate. The new exclusion would be provided in addition to the unified credit which currently lets heirs protect up to $600,000 of their inheritance from the estate tax.

It is critical to take action on estate tax reform now. The $600,000 exemption to the estate tax has not been raised since the mid-1980's. And rising farmland costs coupled with an aging farm population makes swift action on this proposal critical.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation. Please join me in taking a step to ensure that when a family has to face personal tragedy, such as the death of a parent or a loved one, they will not have to worry that it will also lead to the loss of their family farm or business.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE DAY

HON. GEORGE E. BROWN, JR.

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 13, 1997

Mr. BROWN of California. Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I am pleased to come before you today to pay tribute to the remarkable achievements of citizens in my home district and the County of San Bernardino.

As the proceedings concluded last month in Philadelphia at the President's Summit for America's Future, those who have contributed and made a difference in their communities were commemorated. Through both community service and volunteerism, the County of San Bernardino has made a difference.

Participating in the sixth annual ''Make A Difference Day,'' citizens of San Bernardino County defined the term intensely debated over the past few weeks: volunteerism.

In answer to the challenge of Make A Difference Day, San Bernardino organized a project, spearheaded by Mayor Tom Minor, entitled ''Community Cleanup: Our Fight Against Blight.'' As a result, 130 residents from various neighborhoods came out of their houses, set aside differences and worked on a common goal, making their city better. Given the opportunity to communicate and openly express concerns, any neighborhood can become a better place to live. This is exactly what happened on October 26, 1996.

As the fragmented lines that sometimes divide our communities along ethnic, social, and economic barriers were set aside, a single task united the County of San Bernardino.

On October 26, up to 10,000 cars and trucks lined the streets of San Bernardino, all in an effort to properly dispose of 3½ tons of trash. In addition, 5,000 tires were collected and 2,400 gallons of used oil and other hazardous waste were recycled and disposed.

Community Cleanup: Our Fight Against Blight, brought businesses, government, and residents together with a common goal of giving back to the community. This goal was realized by actions such as 16 of the county land fills being open free of charge, and the San Bernardino Refuse Department making free rounds collecting used and unwanted tires.

October 26 was clearly a day when individual residents took responsibility and gave back to the community. The separation of generations had no bearing, as members of all sectors of the community participated. From Girl Scouts collecting trash, to senior citizens cleaning a 4-mile radius of rubbish, the County of San Bernardino made a difference. The volunteers from San Bernardino County served as a shining example for residents of other neighborhoods and communities. Their efforts were so, exemplary that they were chosen as a top 10 winner of the sixth annual USA Weekend's ''Make A Difference Day'' project. The citizens of San Bernardino County have proven that when we come together as neighbors, under a common cause, we can truly make a difference.

DISASTER RELIEF—OAKFIELD, WI

HON. SAM JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 13, 1997

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, in the wake of the tornado disaster in Oakfield WI, I would like to recognize the following 25 men who gave of their personal money, time, and energy to assist with tornado relief. At the invitation of State Senator Carol Buettner, and under the direction of George Workman, Marquette County emergency management director, they served in and around the city of Oakfield, WI, for a period of 2 weeks from July 19 to July 29, 1996. During this time they coordinated relief efforts in removal of trees from homes and cleanup of house debris, while spreading goodwill, faith, hope, and charity wherever they went. Their sacrifice, diligence, and thoroughness conveyed a true sense of brotherly love to the citizens of Oakfield. The experiences these men received while serving will enrich their lives permanently, causing them to become better citizens, and thus have a greater impact on the world around them.

LISTING OF STUDENTS AND (STATES)

Matthew Bertholic (WA), Benjamin Blair (CA), Jonathan Bowers (TN), Jason Butler (AL), David Carne (OR), David Curlett (TX), Timothy Davis (CA), Paul Ellis (MS), Gerald Garcia (MI), Andrew Griffin (WA), Craig Guy (MO).

Trevor Hayes (NY), Joshua Kempson (NJ), Matthew Linquist (CA), Clayton Lord (KS), Russell Moulton (OK), Keon Pendergast (CA), Carl Popowich (CO), Jeremy Sikes (IA), Robert Smith (CA), John Tanner (MI), Matthew Watkins (CA), Matthew Wood (WA), John Worden (CA).

DISASTER RELIEF—BULLITT COUNTY, KENTUCKY

HON. SAM JOHNSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 13, 1997

Mr. SAM JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, in the wake of the tornado disaster in Bullitt County, KY, I would like to recognize the following 19 men who gave of their personal money, time, and energy to assist with tornado relief. At the invitation of state senator Lindy Casebier, and under the direction of the Army Reserve command post, they served in and around the cities of Brooks and Zoneton for a period of 2 weeks from May 31, 1996, to June 12, 1996. During this time they coordinated relief efforts in removal of trees from homes and cleanup of house debris, while spreading goodwill, faith, hope, and charity wherever they went. Their sacrifice, diligence, and thoroughness conveyed a true sense of brotherly love to the citizens of these communities. The experiences these men received while serving will enrich their lives permanently, causing them to become better citizens, and thus have a greater impact on the world around them.

Jason Allen, Ohio; Kory Boudreau, Illinois; T.W. Chapman, Michigan; Michael Forrester, Tennessee; Stanley Forrester, Tennessee; Timothy Hammeke, Kansas; Marvin Heikkila, Michigan; Jason Litt, Ohio; Jason Mallow, Georgia; Daniel Reynolds, Minnesota; Jeremy Sikes, Iowa; Ben Stixrud, Washington, John Tanner, Michigan; Joshua Tanner, Michigan; Justin Tanner, Michigan; Zachary Taylor, Wisconsin; Michael Shoemaker, Indiana; and Matthew Yordy, Indiana.

TRIBUTE TO COL. JAMES VAN EPPS IN HONOR OF HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE U.S. ARMY

HON. WILLIAM O. LIPINSKI

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 13, 1997

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a man of great stature who is retiring after a distinguished career in the U.S. Army, Col. James Van Epps. Colonel Van Epps served in the U.S. Army with more than 30 years of dedicated service to our country.

For the past 2 years Colonel Van Epps has held the position of Commander, North Central Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Chicago, IL. In this position, Colonel Van Epps faced the daunting task of solving water and land resource related problems in a 12 State area from North Dakota to New York, from the Canadian border to parts of Missouri. Colonel Van Epps manages a $380 million budget and directed the engineering, scientific, and support staff of approximately 2,700 personnel who are engaged in civil works construction and environmental activities in this part of the United States. Included in this area are all of the Great Lakes and the upper Mississippi River, in addition to the Souris, Red, and Rainey River Basins. The division's major missions include navigation, flood control, and disaster assistance as well as environmental restoration, regulatory functions, and significant support to the International Joint Commission.

Colonel Van Epps has continually met challenges headon during his tenure, continuing the superb performance record of the North Central Division. Through his personal involvement, leadership and command attention, the Corps made notable progress in the pursuit of solutions to the unique problems which exist throughout the region.

Several very important projects were either initiated, underway or completed under his guidance. Projects which improved the quality of life in the North Central States included, the flood control projects at Fort Wayne and Little Calumet in Indiana; west Des Moines, IA; Chaska, MN; Souris River Basin and Devils Lake, ND and the Chicago Shoreline Project. Under his leadership, the division made great progress in the Mississippi River and Illinois River System Navigation Study and the Upper Mississippi River System—Environmental Management Program [EMP]. The EMP has provided funding to restore and improve the environmental aspects of numerous sites along the Upper Mississippi River System. The Mississippi and Illinois Rivers Navigation Study is the largest navigation study undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The recommendations being developed under this study will affect and influence the economic well-being of the Nation in the next century.

Under the leadership of Colonel Van Epps, the North Central Division achieved a program execution rate of 92 percent and the division has been ranked No. 1 or 2 nationwide among the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in project costs and meeting schedules. Colonel Van Epps' compassionate and caring leadership earned him the respect and trust of the employees under his command. Consequently, Colonel Van Epps' strong commitment to public service has served the citizens of this part of the Nation with honor and professionalism.

Colonel Van Epps graduated from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana with a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering and earned a master of science degree in industrial engineering—operations research—from Kansas State University. He is also a graduate of the engineer officer advanced course, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the National War College. In addition, he has received a certificate in executive education from the Duke University's Fuqua School of Business.

Prior to the assignment to this position, Colonel Van Epps served as the U.S. Forces Command Engineer for 3 years and he served as Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and Installation Management.

His previous experience with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers includes commanding the Huntington (WV) District from September 1990 to August 1992; serving as an Assistant Director of Civil Works at the Corps Headquarters in Washington, DC; and working as a civil engineer and program manager in the Chicago district.

Colonel Van Epps was commissioned a second lieutenant upon graduation as the Distinguished Graduate of his Officer Candidate class in September 1967. During his initial assignment, he served as a platoon leader and company commander of the 518th Engineer Company—Combat, and as a staff officer in Headquarters 193d Infantry Brigade in the Canal Zone. Subsequent assignments include senior advisor to the combat engineer battalion of the 9th Infantry Division—Army of the Republic of Vietnam; Commander, Central Chicago Area, U.S. Army Engineer Recruiting Command; S–3 Officer and Executive Officer—Combat, V Corps, U.S. Army Europe; Commander, 299th Engineer Battalion—Combat at Fort Sill, OK; and Engineer Colonels Assignment Officer, U.S. Army Military Personnel Center in Alexandria, VA.

His military decorations include the Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal—with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Meritorious Service Medal—with four Oak Leaf Clusters, the Air Medal, and the Army Commendation Medal—with Oak Leaf Cluster.

Colonel Van Epps is married to the former Jane Henderson Ryan. They have three children: Geoffrey, who is also in the U.S. Army, Andrew and Amanda.

I know you will all join with me and his employees in saying thank you to him for his loyal and dedicated service to our great country and to the citizens of the North Central Division region. Colonel Van Epps has given a major part of his life to the U.S. Army and is truly deserving of great honor for a career well served in the U.S. Army. We owe him a debt of gratitude for his many years of dedicated service to this country. Thank you Colonel Van Epps for your service to this country.

EQUITY IN ALLOCATION OF VA HEALTH CARE RESOURCES, H.R. 1580

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, May 13, 1997

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation to address some of the multitude of problems that have arisen out of the veterans equity resource allocation plan for VA health care.

In last year's veterans appropriations legislation, the Veterans Administration was mandated by Congress to develop and implement a more equitable method for allocating VA health care resources. In response, the VA has devised the veterans equity resource allocation [VERA] model and based their reallocation process on this plan.

The primary result of this has been the steady hemorrhaging of vital health care funds away from VA VISN's in the Northeast in favor of VISN's in the South and Southwest. While VA officials in the Northeast have gone out of their way to assure congressional offices that the quality of care will not decrease under VERA, this has not been the case.

While VERA is a noble effort, it is based on a fundamentally flawed model. As a research method, VERA is unfairly biased against older veterans in major metropolitan areas. These veterans are those in need of inpatient, comprehensive health care, and they will suffer if VERA is allowed to go forward as planned.

As it currently stands, the VERA model would reallocate health care resources based upon demand for VA health care. The argument that the VA has used with my congressional office is that there is greater demand for VA care in the South and Southwest, while the Northeast and Rust Belt have lower levels of demand.

Under current law, VA health care is freely available to all veterans for problems related to their service-connected disabilities. Non-service-connected care is available for World War I veterans, former prisoners of war, veterans receiving pensions and those who qualify under a means test. The means test is currently $21,660 for a single veteran with no dependents, and $25,660 for a married veteran.

The problem with a national means test, is that it benefits veterans living in low-income areas, such as Arizona, West Virginia and Mississippi, and penalizes veterans living in high-cost areas, such as New York, Washington, and Chicago. After all, $21,660 goes a lot farther in Jackson, MS, than in Manhattan.

A married veteran who is struggling to get by with an income of $27,000 in New York City would be unable to take advantage of free health care through the VA. Yet a similar veteran making $24,000 in Mississippi, would be living much more comfortably, as well as have the advantage of going to the VA for his health care. This shows that the means test does not accurately reflect the economic conditions for each geographic area.

The VERA model also fails to differentiate between the types of care delivered at VA facilities. Initially, it does appear that VA health care in the Southwest is delivered more efficiently than in the Northeast. The important point to consider, however, is the type of care delivered. VA hospitals in the Northeast tend to have more specialized care patients—spinal injury, alcohol/drug abusers, mental health patients, and homeless cases—which obviously cost more than the outpatient cases, which are more plentiful in the Southwest.

Logic would dictate that a true comparison be made between regions before any health care resources are reallocated. Yet the VA has not done this with the VERA model. Instead, the VERA model compares the apples of specialized care in the Northeast with the oranges of outpatient care in the Southwest.

This legislation corrects these inherent flaws within the VA model in three ways.

First, the bill would raise the income level in the means test by 20 percent for any veteran who lives in a standard metropolitan statistical area [SMSA] as defined by the Bureau of the Census. This would make the VA more accessible to veterans who live in high-cost areas, thus increasing the number of veterans who use VA in those regions. Consequently, there would be more outpatient cases treated in the Northeast and Rust Belt.

Second, the bill would move veterans with catastrophic health care expenses from category C—those would must meet the means test for non-service-connected care—to category A—those eligible for free non-service-connected care. These veterans are defined as those individuals whose medical expenses for the previous year exceeded 7.5 percent of their adjusted gross income.

Third, the bill would level the playing field between the Northeast and Southwest by removing the high-cost, inefficient speciality care programs from those funds which can be considered in reallocation calculations under VERA. The programs removed would include: readjustment counseling and treatment, counseling and psychiatric care for the mentally ill, drug and alcohol related programs, programs for the homeless, PTSD programs, spinal cord injury programs, aids programs and geriatric and extended care programs.

This provision protects the resources being used by those veterans most at risk, the majority of whom live in the Northeast and in major urban centers. The above programs help to remove these veterans from the immediate risk by providing them with sanctuary. They can then be diagnosed and treated after which they are reintegrated into society. This process takes time, and is expensive—some would say inefficient. Furthermore, it cannot be done very well on an outpatient basis—one