

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the resolution, as amended, was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

RESCUING ANIMALS WITH REWARDS ACT OF 2019

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 97) to amend the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 to authorize rewards for thwarting wildlife trafficking linked to transnational organized crime, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 97

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Rescuing Animals With Rewards Act of 2019” or the “RAWR Act”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS; SENSE OF CONGRESS.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) Wildlife trafficking is a major transnational crime that is estimated to generate over \$10 billion a year in illegal profits and which is increasingly perpetrated by organized, sophisticated criminal enterprises, including known terrorist organizations.

(2) Wildlife trafficking not only threatens endangered species worldwide, but also jeopardizes local security, spreads disease, undermines rule of law, fuels corruption, and damages economic development.

(3) Combating wildlife trafficking requires a coordinated and sustained approach at the global, regional, national, and local levels.

(4) Congress stated in the Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt Wildlife Trafficking Act of 2016 that it is the policy of the United States to take immediate actions to stop the illegal global trade in wildlife and wildlife products and associated transnational organized crime.

(b) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that the Department of State’s rewards program is a powerful tool in combating sophisticated international crime and that the Department of State and Federal law enforcement should work in concert to offer rewards that target wildlife traffickers.

SEC. 3. REWARDS FOR JUSTICE.

Subparagraph (B) of section 36(k)(5) of the State Department Basic Authorities Act of 1956 (22 U.S.C. 2708(k)(5)) is amended by inserting “wildlife trafficking (as defined by section 2(12) of the Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt Wildlife Trafficking Act of 2016 (16 U.S.C. 7601(12); Public Law 114-231)) and” after “includes”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) and the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. WILSON) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 97, Rescuing Animals With Rewards Act.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume, and rise in support of H.R. 97.

I would like to begin by thanking Mr. BUCHANAN and Ms. TITUS for introducing this important legislation.

In recent years, Congress has taken a number of important steps to combat wildlife trafficking, but the situation remains dire.

Over the last 10 years, one-third of African elephants have been slaughtered for their tusks—one-third. That is just shocking.

Rhino populations have also been decimated, and many other species are at risk.

Protecting wildlife is the right thing to do, but it also serves American national security interests. Wildlife trafficking feeds corruption, undermines the rule of law, threatens economic prosperity, and drives instability. And it is carried out by many of the same international criminal syndicates engaged in the trafficking of drugs, weapons, and people.

The bipartisan, commonsense legislation before us today provides our government with a tool it can use to tackle the illegal trade in wildlife. Specifically, it authorizes rewards, under the State Department’s Rewards for Justice Program, for information leading to the arrest or conviction of those engaged in wildlife trafficking.

This can provide a powerful financial incentive for people to turn in those responsible for this appalling activity.

Where I come from—Bronx, New York—we have the Wildlife Conservation Society doing such wonderful work. It is the Bronx Zoo. They are really doing great work in terms of this. And John Calvelli, a personal friend of mine, is at the forefront of trying to save animals and allowing people to understand what is going on in wildlife trafficking. It is very important, and I commend them for their role.

This authorizes rewards, under the State Department’s Rewards for Justice Program, for information leading to the arrest or conviction of those engaged in wildlife trafficking. This can provide a powerful financial incentive for people to turn in those responsible for this appalling activity.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all of my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this bill to prioritize the targeting of wildlife traffickers as part of the Department of State’s Rewards for Justice Program.

I thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BUCHANAN) for leading this important bill and also Chairman ENGEL for bringing this bill to the floor.

This legislation would give explicit authority to offer financial rewards for information pertaining to the capture or conviction of high-profile wildlife traffickers around the world. This is a powerful tool for Federal law enforcement to target those who engage in wildlife trafficking.

Illicit wildlife trade is a multibillion-dollar industry. This funds terrorists and criminal networks around the world, destabilizing countries and stripping communities of valuable economic resources.

We know that the criminals that poach and then traffic wildlife products are the same people and networks that traffic weapons, drugs, and people.

Our ability to crack down on illicit funding streams for criminal and terrorist networks is critical to U.S. national security interests in the global war on terrorism.

We must ensure that the State Department and our law enforcement personnel have the tools they need to combat this horrible trade.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume for the purpose of closing.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to, once again, urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this good, bipartisan bill to combat wildlife trafficking, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. Cox of California). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 97.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CAMBODIA DEMOCRACY ACT OF 2019

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 526) to promote free and fair elections, political freedoms, and human rights in Cambodia, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 526

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Cambodia Democracy Act of 2019”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Prime Minister Hun Sen has been in power in Cambodia since 1985 and is the longest-serving leader in Southeast Asia. Despite decades of international attention and assistance to promote a pluralistic, multiparty democratic system in Cambodia, the Government of Cambodia continues to be

undemocratically dominated by the ruling Cambodia People's Party (CPP), which controls every agency and security apparatus of the state.

(2) In 2015, the CPP-controlled parliament passed the "Law on Associations and Non-Governmental Organizations", which gave the government sweeping powers to revoke the registration of NGOs that the government believed to be operating with a political bias in a blatant attempt to restrict the legitimate work of civil society. On August 23, 2017, Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered the closure of the National Democratic Institute and the expulsion of its foreign staff. On September 15, 2017, Prime Minister Hun Sen called for the withdrawal of all volunteers from the United States Peace Corps, which has operated in Cambodia since 2006 with 500 United States volunteers providing English language and healthcare training.

(3) The Government of Cambodia has taken several measures to restrict its media environment, especially through politicized tax investigations against independent media outlets that resulted in the closure of The Cambodian Daily and Radio Free Asia in early September 2017. Additionally, the Government of Cambodia has ordered several radio stations to stop the broadcasting of Radio Free Asia and Voice of America programming.

(4) On September 3, 2017, Kem Sokha, the President of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), was arrested on politically motivated charges, including treason and conspiring to overthrow the Government of Cambodia, and faces up to 30 years in prison. The CNRP's previous leader, Sam Rainsy, remains in exile. On November 16, 2017, Cambodia's Supreme Court dissolved the CNRP, eliminating the primary opposition party.

(5) Each of the six elections that have taken place in Cambodia since 1991 were conducted in circumstances that were not free and fair, and were marked by fraud, intimidation, violence, and the government's misuse of legal mechanisms to weaken opposition candidates and parties.

(6) In the most recent general election in July 2018, following the dissolution of the CNRP, the CPP secured every parliamentary seat, an electoral victory that a statement from the White House Press Secretary stated was "neither free nor fair and failed to represent the will of the Cambodian people".

(7) The United States is committed to promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Cambodia. The United States continues to urge the Government of Cambodia to immediately release Mr. Kem Sokha, reinstate the political status of the CNRP and restore its elected seats in the National Assembly, and support electoral reform efforts in Cambodia with free and fair elections monitored by international observers.

SEC. 3. SANCTIONS RELATING TO UNDERMINING DEMOCRACY IN CAMBODIA.

(a) DESIGNATION OF PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR UNDERMINING DEMOCRACY IN CAMBODIA.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the President shall designate and transmit to the appropriate congressional committees a list of—

(A) each senior official of the government, military, or security forces of Cambodia who the President determines has directly and substantially undermined democracy in Cambodia;

(B) each senior official of the government, military, or security forces of Cambodia who the President determines has committed or directed serious human rights violations associated with undermining democracy in Cambodia; and

(C) entities owned or controlled by senior officials of the government, military, or security forces of Cambodia described in subparagraphs (A) and (B).

(2) IMPOSITION OF SANCTIONS.—The President shall impose the sanctions described in subsection (b) on each foreign person designated pursuant to paragraph (1).

(3) UPDATES.—The President shall transmit to the appropriate congressional committees updated lists under paragraph (1) as new information becomes available.

(b) SANCTIONS DESCRIBED.—The sanctions described in this subsection are the following:

(1) ASSET BLOCKING.—The President shall exercise all of the powers granted to the President under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) to the extent necessary to block and prohibit all transactions in property and interests in property of a foreign person designated under subsection (a) if such property and interests in property are in the United States, come within the United States, or are or come within the possession or control of a United States person.

(2) INADMISSIBILITY OF CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS.—

(A) INELIGIBILITY FOR VISAS AND ADMISSION TO THE UNITED STATES.—A foreign person designated under subsection (a) is—

(i) inadmissible to the United States;

(ii) ineligible to receive a visa or other documentation to enter the United States; and

(iii) otherwise ineligible to be admitted or paroled into the United States or to receive any other benefit under the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.).

(B) CURRENT VISAS REVOKED.—A foreign person designated under subsection (a) is subject to the following:

(i) Revocation of any visa or other entry documentation regardless of when the visa or other entry documentation is or was issued.

(ii) A revocation under clause (i) shall—

(I) take effect immediately; and

(II) automatically cancel any other valid visa or entry documentation that is in the foreign person's possession.

(C) EXCEPTION TO COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS.—Sanctions under this paragraph shall not apply with respect to a foreign person if admitting or paroling the person into the United States is necessary to permit the United States to comply with the Agreement regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, signed at Lake Success June 26, 1947, and entered into force November 21, 1947, between the United Nations and the United States, or other applicable international obligations.

(3) PENALTIES.—The penalties provided for in subsections (b) and (c) of section 206 of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1705) shall apply to a foreign person that violates, attempts to violate, conspires to violate, or causes a violation of paragraph (1) to the same extent that such penalties apply to a person that commits an unlawful act described in subsection (a) of such section 206.

(c) IMPLEMENTATION.—The President may exercise all authorities provided under sections 203 and 205 of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1702 and 1704) to carry out this section.

(d) WAIVER.—The President may waive the application of sanctions described in subsection (b) with respect to a person designated under subsection (a) if the President determines and certifies to the appropriate congressional committees that such waiver is in the national interest of the United States.

(e) EXCEPTION RELATING TO IMPORTATION OF GOODS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The authorities and requirements to impose sanctions authorized under this Act shall not include the authority or requirement to impose sanctions on the importation of goods.

(2) GOOD DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term "good" means any article, natural or man-made substance, material, supply or manufactured product, including inspection and test equipment, and excluding technical data.

SEC. 4. SUSPENSION OF SANCTIONS.

(a) SUSPENSION.—The sanctions described in section 3 may be suspended for up to 1-year upon certification by the President to the appropriate congressional committees that Cambodia is making meaningful progress toward the following:

(1) Ending government efforts to undermine democracy.

(2) Ending human rights violations associated with undermining democracy.

(3) Conducting free and fair elections which allow for the active participation of credible opposition candidates.

(b) RENEWAL OF SUSPENSION.—The suspension described in subsection (a) may be renewed for additional, consecutive-day periods if the President certifies to the appropriate congressional committees that Cambodia is continuing to make meaningful progress towards satisfying the conditions described in such subsection during the previous year.

SEC. 5. DETERMINATION OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled "Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation" for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

SEC. 6. SUNSET.

This Act shall terminate on the date that is 5 years after the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 7. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—The term "appropriate congressional committees" means the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Financial Services of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs of the Senate.

(2) PERSON.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The term "person" means—

(i) a natural person; or

(ii) a corporation, business association, partnership, society, trust, financial institution, insurer, underwriter, guarantor, and any other business organization, any other nongovernmental entity, organization, or group, and any governmental entity operating as a business enterprise or any successor to any entity described in this clause.

(B) APPLICATION TO GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES.—The term "person" does not include a government or governmental entity that is not operating as a business enterprise.

(3) UNITED STATES PERSON.—The term "United States person" means—

(A) a United States citizen or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence to the United States; or

(B) an entity organized under the laws of the United States or of any jurisdiction of the United States, including a foreign branch of such an entity.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from

New York (Mr. ENGEL) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 526.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOHO), a valued member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, for his hard work on this measure.

This is an example of what our committee does best: good, bipartisan legislation aimed at advancing American interests and leadership and, especially in this case, our values—our support for human rights around the world. So, I thank Mr. YOHO for this.

Hun Sen, Cambodia's strongman Prime Minister, has been in power since 1985. He has clung to power longer than any other current leader in southeast Asia. He has violently suppressed dissent. He intimidates any opposition.

Civil society cannot operate freely. His government restricts free speech and free media, the bedrocks of any democracy.

For 30 years, the Cambodian people have hoped to see their country move toward a freer, more democratic system. Democracies around the world have hoped for the same thing, investing for decades in the hopes of building a pluralistic, multiparty system in Cambodia.

Progress has been halting at best, and results are woefully incomplete. Six elections have been held in Cambodia since 1991. None of them was free or fair.

But we won't give up on the Cambodian people. This legislation gives the President and State Department more tools to sanction Cambodian leaders who undermine democracy and commit gross human rights violations.

This bill would prohibit those individuals from entering the United States and block any assets or property they may possess in our country.

This bill sends a clear message that the United States stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Cambodia and that Congress will hold Cambodia's leaders accountable for their assault on democracy and violations of human rights.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to cosponsor this bill. I am glad we are moving it forward today. I thank Mr. WILSON, and I reserve the balance of my time.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY,
Washington, DC, July 12, 2019.

Hon. ELIOT L. ENGEL,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: This is to advise you that the Committee on the Judiciary has now had an opportunity to review the provisions in H.R. 526, the "Cambodia Democracy Act of 2019" that fall within our Rule X jurisdiction. I appreciate your consulting with us on those provisions. The Judiciary Committee has no objection to your including them in the bill for consideration on the House floor, and to expedite that consideration is willing to waive sequential referral, with the understanding that we do not thereby waive any future jurisdictional claim over those provisions or their subject matters.

In the event a House-Senate conference on this or similar legislation is convened, the Judiciary Committee reserves the right to request an appropriate number of conferees to address any concerns with these or similar provisions that may arise in conference.

Please place this letter into the Congressional Record during consideration of the measure on the House floor. Thank you for the cooperative spirit in which you have worked regarding this matter and others between our committees.

Sincerely,

JERROLD NADLER,
Chairman.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC, July 9, 2019.

Hon. JERROLD NADLER,
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I am writing to you concerning H.R. 526, the Cambodia Democracy Act of 2019.

I appreciate your willingness to work cooperatively on this legislation. I recognize that the bill contains provisions that fall within the jurisdiction of the Committee on the Judiciary. I acknowledge that the Committee will not formally consider H.R. 526 and agree that the inaction of your Committee with respect to the bill does not waive any future jurisdictional claim over the matters contained in H.R. 526 which fall within your Committee's Rule X jurisdiction.

I will ensure that our exchange of letters is included in the Congressional Record during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation and look forward to continuing to work with you as this measure moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

ELIOT L. ENGEL,
Chairman.

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the Cambodia Democracy Act introduced by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOHO), and I would note that I happen to be the co-chair of the Congressional Cambodian Caucus, along with the gentleman from California, ALAN LOWENTHAL. He and I, a Republican and a Democrat, have worked on this particular issue for many years now.

So, I certainly thank the committee for moving forward with this very good and helpful piece of legislation.

The people of Cambodia have been living under the iron-fisted rule of Hun

Sen, as the chairman mentioned, for, literally, decades. Under his reign, he has denied Cambodians almost all of their political rights and prevented free and fair elections from taking place.

In recent years, Hun Sen has resorted to violence and attacked peaceful protesters many times. He has undermined any sense of democracy by dismantling the country's only viable opposition party.

The work of NGOs has also been dramatically limited, and critical media outlets have been virtually shut down.

Like many other dictators, he fears the day when he will no longer be in power.

□ 1630

As the beacon of hope and freedom to the rest of the world, a key pillar of our foreign policy must be to support the expansion of democracy in other countries. That is why I am very, very proud to support and cosponsor the Cambodian Democracy Act.

This bill pushes back on Hun Sen's regime by applying asset-blocking sanctions on any government officials or security forces who undermine the democratic process or take part in human rights abuses. This legislation also codifies visa restrictions for these individuals.

This is a strong, bipartisan bill that will allow us to show our support for the people of Cambodia and their desire for democratic governance. Members of both parties should support this important piece of legislation. I would fully expect them to do so.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank Congressman YOHO; I want to thank Mr. ENGEL and Mr. MCCAUL as well, for introducing this bill, and for all of their work on behalf of the Cambodian people. I certainly appreciate their support on this.

Supporting democracy abroad is very important, really a critical endeavor. The world will be a more peaceful and prosperous place with the expansion of free markets and free people.

I would urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume for the purpose of closing.

I want to thank my colleague, Mr. CHABOT, for doing this with me. Last time I saw him was a few days ago in my home city of New York. We were going to meet the president of Taiwan, another Asian country that has great freedom.

Mr. CHABOT. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. ENGEL. I yield to the gentleman from Ohio.

Mr. CHABOT. I thank the gentleman for yielding. I am glad that we were there Friday night and not Saturday night. I know you had some electrical difficulties in the city the following evening. I am glad we weren't there then.

Mr. ENGEL. Well, I would say to the gentleman, if it happened on the other night, I would have invited him to my house for a drink, but we will have to do that another time.

Mr. Speaker, supporting democracy and human rights around the world is an area where our values and our interests clearly intersect.

Basic freedoms: Accountable, transparent governments, respect for individual dignity, these are the values we seek to promote around the world and the values that underpin a vibrant democracy.

They are also what makes countries stronger, better and more stable partners for the United States on the world stage. That is good for our interests and our security as well.

So we want to keep supporting the people of Cambodia, we want them to have a say in the future of their country. That starts by demanding accountability for those who have suppressed democracy and basic freedoms. This bill is an important step in that process. I am glad to support it. I urge all Members to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. ENGEL) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 526, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ACCESS TO SUFFICIENT CAPITAL FOR EVERYONE IN NATURAL DISASTER AREAS ACT OF 2019

Mr. DELGADO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 277) to adjust collateral requirements under the Small Business Act for disaster loans, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 277

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Access to Sufficient Capital for Everyone in Natural Disaster areas Act of 2019” or the “ASCEND Act of 2019”.

SEC. 2. COLLATERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR DISASTER LOANS UNDER THE SMALL BUSINESS ACT.

(a) AMENDMENT TO THE RISE AFTER DISASTER ACT OF 2015.—Section 2102 of the RISE After Disaster Act of 2015 (Public Law 114-88) is amended—

(1) by striking subsections (b) and (c); and

(2) by striking “(a) IN GENERAL.—”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall take effect as though enacted as part of the RISE After Disaster Act of 2015.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from

New York (Mr. DELGADO) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DELGADO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the measure under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. DELGADO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise today in support of H.R. 277, the Access to Sufficient Capital for Everyone in Natural Disaster Areas Act, also called the ASCEND Act.

However, before we get to the substance of the bill, I want to thank the ranking member, Ranking Member CHABOT, and his staff, for working in a bipartisan way on this package of bills.

I also would like to thank all our Members, both Republican and Democrat, for their hard work and continued bipartisan commitment to putting small businesses first. It is, once again, a reminder of the importance of working across the aisle and getting things done for the American people.

Being the only committee dedicated solely to the needs of small firms, we remain committed on working to promote policies that will encourage economic prosperity on Main Street.

Access to capital is essential for business success, and it is particularly true after a natural disaster. That is why I rise in support of H.R. 277, the ASCEND Act, which will permanently set the unsecured credit threshold for SBA's disaster loans at \$25,000.

The SBA's Disaster Assistance program was implemented to provide timely financial assistance in the form of low-interest loans and working capital for businesses and homeowners devastated by a disaster.

Continual improvement and modernization of the program has been a priority of our committee for many years. And as we continue to experience increased disasters, both in frequency and strength, it is imperative Congress provides the necessary policies to get communities back on their feet.

One of those policies originated in the 114th Congress as part of a bill introduced by Chairwoman NYDIA VELÁZQUEZ, H.R. 208, the Recovery Improvements for Small Entities After Disaster Act of 2015, the RISE Act. That law raised the collateralization threshold on disaster loans to make it easier for victims to obtain capital to rebuild their homes and businesses. Unfortunately, this provision will expire this year, so Congress must act.

H.R. 277 permanently raises the minimum disaster loan amount that the SBA may require collateral from \$14,000 to \$25,000. This means that a dis-

aster victim can continue to receive a \$25,000 loan, rather than just \$14,000, within 5 days of closing to speed up the reconstruction project.

Raising the unsecured loan amount provides support for Americans when they need it most. And for smaller businesses, time and again, we have seen that in the aftermath of a disaster, access to affordable credit can make the difference between remaining in business or closing their doors and putting Americans out of work.

Without this legislation, the unsecured loan limit for agency declarations will revert to the lower limits and create an unfair discrepancy for disaster survivors in areas of an SBA declaration and that of a major disaster declaration.

I thank Ranking Member CHABOT for cosponsoring this legislation, which allows more borrowers to access loans without having to put up collateral. I urge Members to support this bipartisan piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of H.R. 277, the Access to Sufficient Capital for Everyone in Natural Disaster Areas Act of 2019, as also known as the ASCEND Act.

I want to thank the gentleman from New York, as well as the chairwoman of the committee, Ms. VELÁZQUEZ, for their bipartisan cooperation on the committee. It is probably one of the most, if not the most, bipartisan committee in Congress. We really do work together on behalf of small business; so I would like to thank the gentleman and, as always, Ms. VELÁZQUEZ.

When natural disasters strike the Nation, the U.S. SBA, the Small Business Administration, leads the government's long-term recovery efforts through its Disaster Loan Program. This program, which offers low-interest and fixed-rate financing to individuals and businesses, helps communities and neighborhoods as they recover and rebuild.

To assist disaster victims quickly and efficiently, the SBA offers an initial unsecured loan disbursement of \$25,000 to qualified victims. However, after November, that was going to drop to 14,000, and this reduced loan level would conflict with the disbursement levels attributed to all other declared disasters.

Immediately after a catastrophe, and when victims need help the most, loan levels across the SBA's Disaster Loan Program should be clear and consistent. So H.R. 277, this bill, codifies the \$25,000 unsecured loan limit for Physical Damage Loans under an SBA Agency disaster declaration.

I would, again, like to thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for their cooperation in attaining this effort, and I urge my colleagues to support the ASCEND Act.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.