

MREIDL loan a business can take and raises, from \$5,000 to \$50,000, the level of uncollateralized MREIDL loans available to businesses. Finally, our changes to the MREIDL program would allow the SBA administrator to defer the payment of principal and interest while the employee is deployed.

The bill would also create a new interagency task force to coordinate the efforts of Federal agencies necessary to increase capital and business development opportunities for, and increase the award of Federal contracting opportunities to, small businesses owned and controlled by veterans. This type of coordinated and targeted effort by our Federal Government is long overdue.

Additionally, today's legislation would increase funding for the SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development, and permanently extend the duties and responsibilities of the SBA Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs. It would also allow small businesses owned and operated by veterans to extend their SBA program participation time limitations by the duration of their owner's deployment.

While I have not provided an exhaustive list of this bill's provisions and all that it would do, a simple review of the legislation will reveal that it goes far toward helping our Nation's veteran entrepreneurs and our patriotic small businesses that employ reservists, despite the risk that deployments entail. To that end, I once again urge my colleagues to join us in support of this bill.

Mr. REID. I understand there is a substitute amendment at the desk. I ask unanimous consent that the Coburn amendment at the desk be considered agreed to; the substitute, as amended, be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be read a third time, and the Senate then proceed to H.R. 4253, which is at the desk; that all after the enacting clause be stricken and the text of S. 1784, as amended, be inserted in lieu thereof; that the bill be advanced to third reading, passed, and the motion to reconsider be laid on the table; that any statements relating to this matter be printed in the RECORD without further intervening action or debate; and that S. 1784 then be placed on the calendar.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 3886) was agreed to, as follows:

On page 4, line 25, strike "increase" and all that follows through "opportunities to" on page 5, line 2, and insert "improve capital and business development opportunities for, and ensure achievement of the pre-established Federal contracting goals for".

On page 5, line 10, after the semicolon, add "and".

On page 5, line 22, strike "; and" and insert a period.

On page 5, strike lines 23 through 25.

On page 6, strike line 1 and all that follows through page 7, line 16, and insert the following:

"(3) DUTIES.—The task force shall—

"(A) consult regularly with veterans service organizations and military organizations in performing the duties of the task force; and

"(B) coordinate administrative and regulatory activities and develop proposals relating to—

"(i) improving capital access and capacity of small business concerns owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans and small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans through loans, surety bonding, and franchising;

"(ii) ensuring achievement of the pre-established Federal contracting goals for small business concerns owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans and small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans through expanded mentor-protégé assistance and matching such small business concerns with contracting opportunities;

"(iii) increasing the integrity of certifications of status as a small business concern owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans or a small business concern owned and controlled by veterans;

"(iv) reducing paperwork and administrative burdens on veterans in accessing business development and entrepreneurship opportunities;

"(v) increasing and improving training and counseling services provided to small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans; and

"(vi) making other improvements relating to the support for veterans business development by the Federal Government.

On page 9, strike line 13 and all that follows through page 10, line 8, and insert the following:

"(e) WOMEN VETERANS BUSINESS TRAINING.—The Associate Administrator shall—

"(1) compile information on existing resources available to women veterans for business training, including resources for—

"(A) vocational and technical education;

"(B) general business skills, such as marketing and accounting; and

"(C) business assistance programs targeted to women veterans; and

"(2) disseminate the information compiled under paragraph (1) through Veteran Business Outreach Centers and women's business centers."

On page 11, strike line 10 and all that follows through page 20, line 23, and insert the following:

SEC. 201. VETERANS ASSISTANCE AND SERVICES PROGRAM.

On page 22, between lines 10 and 11, insert the following:

SEC. 202. DISASTER LOANS.

Section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(3)) is amended—

(1) in subparagraph (E), by striking "unless" and all that follows and inserting a period; and

(2) by inserting after subparagraph (I), the following:

"(J) There shall be reasonable assurance that a loan recipient under this paragraph can repay the loan of personal or business cash flow."

On page 22, line 21, strike "waive" and all that follows through "date" on line 23 and insert "extend the ending date specified in the preceding sentence by not more than 1 year".

On page 24, line 4, strike "shall" and insert "may".

On page 32, between lines 9 and 10, insert the following:

(d) ADDITIONAL STUDY.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Office of Advocacy of the Administration shall submit to Congress a report describing—

(1) the barriers in place arising from Federal regulations for veterans who wish to become entrepreneurs;

(2) the barriers in place arising from the tax code for veterans who wish to become entrepreneurs; and

(3) any recommendations for how best to eliminate those barriers to better assist current or prospective veteran small business owners.

The substitute amendment (No. 3885), as amended, was agreed to.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The bill was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading and was read the third time.

The bill (H.R. 4253), as amended, was ordered to be read a third time, was read the third time and passed.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

YEAR-END LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, last night, when everybody was rushing around in the well during the last vote and wishing each other a Merry Christmas, I was reminded of something Senator LOTT said yesterday morning. He told us not to forget that we all have normal lives and families to get home to and the same basic concerns in life as everybody else; and that if we forget that, then this body is in serious trouble.

It is in that spirit that I would like to wrap up the year in pretty much the same way I tried to open it, by urging a little more cooperation and civility. About a year ago now, I called on my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to take advantage of the rare opportunity divided government gave us to tackle big issues on a bipartisan basis. Beyond that, I said Republicans had a few basic priorities: keeping Americans safe and secure, protecting their basic freedoms, protecting their wallets, and spending their money wisely. I said we would not hesitate to ensure these priorities by shaping worthy legislation or by blocking legislation that would undermine them.

Looking back on the year, I think we have been pretty successful at it.

Early on, Democrats presented us with a minimum wage bill that undermined small businesses, and it did not pass. When they agreed to include a tax break, it sailed through by a vote of 94-3. We shaped that one.

A little later, Democrats gave us an energy conservation bill that would have led to higher taxes, and it did not pass. When they agreed to remove the tax hikes 6 months later, it passed easily, 86-13. We shaped that one.

Then they offered to extend a ban on the AMT middle-class tax hike for 1 more year, but to cover the cost by imposing a new tax on the same 23 million Americans who are about to be