

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

whacked by it. The AMT was never meant to hit middle-class families, so a new tax to pay for the mistake was plainly unfair. When Democrats finally took it out, the AMT fix passed the Senate 88-5. We shaped that one.

Again and again, we have insisted the minority be heard and, in the end, we were. We have shaped a lot of legislation this year to ensure that Republican priorities were addressed. We are proud of it.

We have also stopped a lot of things that we thought would undermine our security.

The most prominent example, of course, is Iraq. After last night, Senate Democrats had held 34 votes this year related to the war in Iraq. And on every one that either attempted to substitute our judgment for the judgment of our commanders or cut off funds for our men and women in the field, we prevailed.

So we have shaped a lot of things we thought were worthy, things like the AMT fix and the energy conservation bill. And we have proudly blocked some things that we thought were just bad ideas altogether, like pulling our troops out of Iraq before the Petraeus Plan had time to take hold.

But our intention from the start was always, if possible, to avoid confrontation as an end unto itself. The history books are filled with examples of the things Congress achieved when opposite parties controlled the White House and the Congress. That was always our first option.

Unfortunately, our friends seemed intent on forcing votes all year, whether they be on Iraq or any number of domestic issues, that never had a chance of either passing the Senate or of becoming law. The practical effect, of course, is that very little would get accomplished in the end.

But it didn't have to be that way. On the bills I have mentioned, Democrats had a choice: they could have presented us first with the version they knew we could cooperate on. Or, as we saw all too often, they could present us with a partisan bill that could only serve them as a talking point. When they chose the former, we racked up some serious accomplishments together.

Over the last week, we have seen this kind of cooperation work on the energy conservation bill and on the AMT.

I have actually enjoyed working with the distinguished majority leader all year. I won't be the first person to remark that he has a tough job. But he has shown a lot of patience this year, and he has put up with a lot. So I want to thank him for his collegiality and his friendship.

I also want to thank him once again for speaking to the students at the McConnell Center in Louisville in October. It meant a lot to the students, and it meant a lot to me. A lot of people seem surprised when I tell them the last two Senators I have had speak at the center are Senator KENNEDY and Senator REID.

All of us were put here by voters with vastly different backgrounds who hold vastly different views. And the fact that we can work together and pass legislation that covers every one of them is really the glory of this institution and this country. But we will never be able to do that if we are not gentlemanly and respectful. TRENT had it right. We can't lose sight of the important things.

In that spirit, I thank all of our colleagues and staffs on both sides of the aisle, Republicans and Democrats, for all the sacrifices they have made this year and for all the grief they took from their constituents, their wives, their husbands, and their kids for living the kind of life we all live in this fishbowl. I know a lot of them are on their way home at the moment. I am glad they are. I must say I am not far behind. But I do want to wish them all a very warm, happy, and Merry Christmas with their families.

I might say to my good friend the majority leader and to all of our colleagues, we are looking forward to a month off and then looking forward to getting back together at the end of January to see what we can accomplish next year for the American people.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have a statement I will give later in the day about what we have done this year. But I want to take this opportunity to reciprocate with the kind words the distinguished Republican leader said on my behalf.

Without in any way taking away from the opportunities we have, Senator MCCONNELL and I, as being Democratic and Republican leaders of the Senate, the majority and minority leaders of the Senate, these are wonderful opportunities, honors neither one of us would ever imagine we would have. I have been in government a long time, as has my friend the Republican leader. We both recognize that we have to set an example for the rest of the body in patience, in cordiality, and being gentlemen and friends to each other. I think we have done that.

We have gone through some difficult times, criticized not each other personally but as to what has taken place there has been criticism. That will continue, and there is nothing wrong with that. I would like to say my criticism is constructive in nature, and I hope that is how I take any criticism that I get from the other side.

We have a lot to do next year. Next year will actually be more difficult than this year because we will be in the midst of a Presidential election. For me, though, I will have three Democratic Senators back working full time. That will be very pleasant. We will not have to try to arrange the schedule for all four of them.

Scheduling is hard because the Senate has changed over the years, even since I have been here. Schedules are

now a lot determined by airplane schedules, not Senate schedules. But on the one hand, when Senators are forced to think about having to be here and not do their fundraising over a weekend, or going back to their States, we tend to get a lot done. We have had to, on occasion—several occasions this year—say we are going to have to be in on the weekend, but with the exception of one weekend, or maybe two weekends, we were able to get the same amount of work done had we stayed here all weekend.

So, again, I say to my friend, the Senator from Kentucky, the Republican leader, we have a lot to look forward to next year. We are going to see a new President to replace President Bush. We hope that will create, in the last year of President Bush's term, more cordiality between the two of us.

I have a meeting later today with the President's Chief of Staff. I hope that will bear fruit. One of the things we have to work on is to try to not have to be in session during the entire next month. We have Senators lined up to cover that. I hope we can work something out with the White House so that is not necessary because there is a significant number of Democratic nominations and a large number of Republican nominations we would like to clear. Hopefully, we can do that later today.

So I will be back later, but I do want to express my appreciation for the kind words and thoughts of my friend, the Senator from Kentucky.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, and that the Senator from Rhode Island, Mr. REED, will be recognized for up to 30 minutes.

The Senator from Wyoming.

THANKING THE MAJORITY AND REPUBLICAN LEADERS

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I thank our leaders for getting together and working things out so we were able to conclude our votes late last night and begin the Christmas recess. It was a relief to many to know they were not going to be here through Christmas due to complications that could arise from airplanes. Today, though, I am going to talk about something that is completely different.

TRIBUTE TO KATHERINE MCGUIRE

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I am joined on the floor by Katherine McGuire,