

Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users.”

(c) EXPANDED BUS SERVICE IN SMALL COMMUNITIES.—Section 5307(b)(2) of title 49, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in the paragraph heading, by striking “2007” and inserting “2009”;

(2) in subparagraph (A), by striking “2007” and inserting “2009”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(E) MAXIMUM AMOUNTS IN FISCAL YEARS 2008 AND 2009.—In fiscal years 2008 and 2009—

“(i) amounts made available to any urbanized area under clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (A) shall be not more than 50 percent of the amount apportioned in fiscal year 2002 to the urbanized area with a population of less than 200,000, as determined in the 1990 decennial census of population;

“(ii) amounts made available to any urbanized area under subparagraph (A)(iii) shall be not more than 50 percent of the amount apportioned to the urbanized area under this section for fiscal year 2003; and

“(iii) each portion of any area not designated as an urbanized area, as determined by the 1990 decennial census, and eligible to receive funds under subparagraph (A)(iv), shall receive an amount of funds to carry out this section that is not less than 50 percent of the amount the portion of the area received under section 5311 in fiscal year 2002.”.

NOTICE OF HEARING

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I would like to announce for the information of the Senate and the public that a hearing has been scheduled before the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. The hearing will be held on Thursday, February 7, 2008, at 9:30 a.m., in room SD-366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

The purpose of the oversight hearing is to receive testimony on the energy market effects of the recently passed renewable fuel standard.

Because of the limited time available for the hearing, witnesses may testify by invitation only. However, those wishing to submit written testimony for the hearing record may do so by sending it to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510-6150, or by e-mail to Rosemarie Calabro@energy.senate.gov.

For further information, please contact Tara Billingsley at (202) 224-4756 or Rosemarie Calabro at (202) 224-5039.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on January 31, 2008, at 10 a.m., in order to conduct a hearing entitled “Strengthening Our Economy: Foreclosure Prevention and Neighborhood Preservation.”

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, January 31, 2008, at 10 a.m., in room SD-366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, for the purposes of conducting a hearing.

The purpose of the hearing is to receive testimony on the regulatory aspects of carbon capture, transportation, and sequestration and to receive testimony on two related bills: S. 2323, a bill to provide for the conduct of carbon capture and storage technology research, development and demonstration projects, and for other purposes; and S. 2144, a bill to require the Secretary of Energy to conduct a study of the feasibility relating to the construction and operation of pipelines and carbon dioxide sequestration facilities, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Environment and Public Works be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, January 31, 2008, at 10 a.m., in room 406 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building in order to conduct a hearing entitled, “A Hearing to Receive the Report of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission.”

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Committee on the Judiciary be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate, in order to conduct an executive business meeting on Thursday, January 31, 2008, at 4 p.m., in room SD-226 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

Agenda

I. Bills: S. 1638, Federal Judicial Salary Restoration Act of 2007 (LEAHY, HATCH, FEINSTEIN, GRAHAM, KENNEDY); S. 352, Sunshine in the Courtroom Act of 2007 (GRASSLEY, SCHUMER, LEAHY, SPECTER, GRAHAM, FEINGOLD, CORNYN, DURBIN); S. 2450, a bill to amend the Federal Rules of Evidence to address the waiver of the attorney-client privilege and the work product doctrine (LEAHY, SPECTER, GRAHAM); S. 2304, Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Reauthorization and Improvement Act of 2007 (DOMENICI, KENNEDY, SPECTER, LEAHY)

II. Nominations: Mark R. Filip to be Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice; Ondray T. Harris to be Director, Community Relations Service, Department of Justice; David W. Hagy to be Director, National Institute of Justice, Department of Justice.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, January 31, 2008, at 9:30 a.m. in order to hold a hearing on Afghanistan.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PERSONNEL SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Personnel Subcommittee of the Committee on Armed Services be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, January 31, 2008, at 9:30 a.m., in open session to hold an oversight hearing on military recruiting.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Special Committee on Aging be authorized to meet on Thursday, January 31, 2008 from 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. in SH-216 for the purpose of conducting a hearing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT GOVERNMENT INFORMATION FEDERAL SERVICES, AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs' Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Thursday, January 31, 2008, at 2:30 p.m. in order to conduct a hearing entitled, “Eliminating Agency Payment Errors.”

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that Colin Brooks, a fellow on my staff, be granted the privilege of the floor for the remainder of the day.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MILITARY RESERVIST AND VETERAN SMALL BUSINESS REAUTHORIZATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2008

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to lay before the Senate a message from the House with respect to H.R. 4253, the small business veterans military reservist legislation.

There being no objection, the Presiding Officer (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) laid before the Senate the following message from the House of Representatives:

H.R. 4253

Resolved, That the House agree to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 4253) entitled "An Act to improve and expand small business assistance programs for veterans of the armed forces and military reservists, and for other purposes", with the following: House Amendment to Senate Amendment:

In lieu of the matter proposed to be inserted by the amendment of the Senate, insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act of 2008".

SEC. 2. TABLE OF CONTENTS.

The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

- Sec. 1. Short title.
- Sec. 2. Table of contents.
- Sec. 3. Definitions.

TITLE I—VETERANS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- Sec. 101. Increased funding for the Office of Veterans Business Development.
- Sec. 102. Interagency task force.
- Sec. 103. Permanent extension of SBA Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs.
- Sec. 104. Office of Veterans Business Development.
- Sec. 105. Increasing the number of outreach centers.
- Sec. 106. Independent study on gaps in availability of outreach centers.
- Sec. 107. Veterans assistance and services program.

TITLE II—RESERVIST PROGRAMS

- Sec. 201. Reservist programs.
- Sec. 202. Reservist loans.
- Sec. 203. Noncollateralized loans.
- Sec. 204. Loan priority.
- Sec. 205. Relief from time limitations for veteran-owned small businesses.
- Sec. 206. Service-disabled veterans.
- Sec. 207. Study on options for promoting positive working relations between employers and their Reserve Component employees.
- Sec. 208. Increased Veteran Participation Program.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act—

- (1) the term "activated" means receiving an order placing a Reservist on active duty;
- (2) the term "active duty" has the meaning given that term in section 101 of title 10, United States Code;
- (3) the terms "Administration" and "Administrator" mean the Small Business Administration and the Administrator thereof, respectively;
- (4) the term "Reservist" means a member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces, as described in section 10101 of title 10, United States Code;
- (5) the term "Service Corps of Retired Executives" means the Service Corps of Retired Executives authorized by section 8(b)(1) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 637(b)(1));
- (6) the terms "service-disabled veteran" and "small business concern" have the meaning as in section 3 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632);
- (7) the term "small business development center" means a small business development center described in section 21 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 648); and
- (8) the term "women's business center" means a women's business center described in section 29 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 656).

TITLE I—VETERANS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

SEC. 101. INCREASED FUNDING FOR THE OFFICE OF VETERANS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT.

(a) IN GENERAL.—There are authorized to be appropriated to the Office of Veterans Business

Development of the Administration, to remain available until expended—

- (1) \$2,100,000 for fiscal year 2008; and
- (2) \$2,300,000 for fiscal year 2009.

(b) FUNDING OFFSET.—Amounts necessary to carry out subsection (a) shall be offset and made available through the reduction of the authorization of funding under section 20(e)(1)(B)(iv) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 631 note).

(c) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Congress that any amounts provided pursuant to this section that are in excess of amounts provided to the Administration for the Office of Veterans Business Development in fiscal year 2007, should be used to support Veterans Business Outreach Centers.

SEC. 102. INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE.

Section 32 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657b) is amended—

- (1) by redesignating subsection (c) as (f); and
- (2) by inserting after subsection (b) the following:

"(c) INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE.—

"(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this subsection, the President shall establish an interagency task force to coordinate the efforts of Federal agencies necessary to improve capital and business development opportunities for, and ensure 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 (in this section referred to as the 'task force').

"(2) MEMBERSHIP.—The members of the task force shall include—

- "(A) the Administrator, who shall serve as chairperson of the task force; and
- "(B) a senior level representative from—
- "(i) the Department of Veterans Affairs;
- "(ii) the Department of Defense;
- "(iii) the Administration (in addition to the Administrator);
- "(iv) the Department of Labor;
- "(v) the Department of the Treasury;
- "(vi) the General Services Administration;
- "(vii) the Office of Management and Budget; and

"(viii) 4 representatives from a veterans service organization or military organization or association, selected by the President.

"(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."

SEC. 103. PERMANENT EXTENSION OF SBA ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VETERANS BUSINESS AFFAIRS.

(a) ASSUMPTION OF DUTIES.—Section 33 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657c) is amended—

- (1) by striking subsection (h); and
- (2) by redesignating subsections (i) through (k) as subsections (h) through (j), respectively.

(b) PERMANENT EXTENSION OF AUTHORITY.—Section 203 of the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999 (15 U.S.C. 657b note) is amended by striking subsection (h).

SEC. 104. OFFICE OF VETERANS BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT.

Section 32 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657b) is amended by inserting after subsection (c) (as added by section 102) the following:

"(d) PARTICIPATION IN TAP WORKSHOPS.—

"(1) IN GENERAL.—The Associate Administrator shall increase veteran outreach by ensuring that Veteran Business Outreach Centers regularly participate, on a nationwide basis, in the workshops of the Transition Assistance Program of the Department of Labor.

"(2) PRESENTATIONS.—In carrying out paragraph (1), a Veteran Business Outreach Center may provide grants to entities located in Transition Assistance Program locations to make presentations on the opportunities available from the Administration for recently separating or separated veterans. Each presentation under this paragraph shall include, at a minimum, a description of the entrepreneurial and business training resources available from the Administration.

"(3) WRITTEN MATERIALS.—The Associate Administrator shall—

"(A) create written materials that provide comprehensive information on self-employment and veterans entrepreneurship, including information on resources available from the Administration on such topics; and

"(B) make the materials created under subparagraph (A) available to the Secretary of Labor for inclusion in the Transition Assistance Program manual.

"(4) REPORTS.—The Associate Administrator shall submit to Congress progress reports on the implementation of this subsection.

"(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."

SEC. 105. INCREASING THE NUMBER OF OUTREACH CENTERS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall use the authority in section 8(b)(17) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 637(b)(17)) to ensure that the number of Veterans Business Outreach Centers throughout the United States increases—

- (1) subject to subsection (b), by at least 2, for each of fiscal years 2008 and 2009; and
- (2) by the number that the Administrator considers appropriate, based on need, for each fiscal year thereafter.

(b) LIMITATION.—Subsection (a)(1) shall apply in a fiscal year if, for that fiscal year, the amount made available for the Office of Veterans Business Development is more than the amount made available for the Office of Veterans Business Development for fiscal year 2007.

SEC. 106. INDEPENDENT STUDY ON GAPS IN AVAILABILITY OF OUTREACH CENTERS.

The Administrator shall sponsor an independent study on gaps in the availability of

Veterans Business Outreach Centers across the United States, to inform decisions on funding and on the allocation and coordination of resources. Not later than 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall submit to Congress a report on the results of the study.

SEC. 107. VETERANS ASSISTANCE AND SERVICES PROGRAM.

Section 21 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 648) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(n) VETERANS ASSISTANCE AND SERVICES PROGRAM.—

“(1) IN GENERAL.—A small business development center may apply for a grant under this subsection to carry out a veterans assistance and services program.

“(2) ELEMENTS OF PROGRAM.—Under a program carried out with a grant under this subsection, a small business development center shall—

“(A) create a marketing campaign to promote awareness and education of the services of the center that are available to veterans, and to target the campaign toward veterans, service-disabled veterans, military units, Federal agencies, and veterans organizations;

“(B) use technology-assisted online counseling and distance learning technology to overcome the impediments to entrepreneurship faced by veterans and members of the Armed Forces; and

“(C) increase coordination among organizations that assist veterans, including by establishing virtual integration of service providers and offerings for a one-stop point of contact for veterans who are entrepreneurs or owners of small business concerns.

“(3) AMOUNT OF GRANTS.—A grant under this subsection shall be for not less than \$75,000 and not more than \$250,000.

“(4) FUNDING.—Subject to amounts approved in advance in appropriations Acts, the Administrator may make grants or enter into cooperative agreements to carry out the provisions of this subsection.”.

TITLE II—RESERVIST PROGRAMS

SEC. 201. RESERVIST PROGRAMS.

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

(1) by striking “90 days” and inserting “1 year”; and

(2) by adding at the end the following: “The Administrator may, when appropriate (as determined by the Administrator), extend the ending date specified in the preceding sentence by not more than 1 year.”.

(b) PRE-CONSIDERATION PROCESS.—

(1) DEFINITION.—In this subsection, the term “eligible Reservist” means a Reservist who—

(A) has not been ordered to active duty;

(B) expects to be ordered to active duty during a period of military conflict; and

(C) can reasonably demonstrate that the small business concern for which that Reservist is a key employee will suffer economic injury in the absence of that Reservist.

(2) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator shall establish a pre-consideration process, under which the Administrator—

(A) may collect all relevant materials necessary for processing a loan to a small business concern under section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(3)) before an eligible Reservist employed by that small business concern is activated; and

(B) shall distribute funds for any loan approved under subparagraph (A) if that eligible Reservist is activated.

(c) OUTREACH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Administrator, in consultation with the Secretary

of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of Defense, may develop a comprehensive outreach and technical assistance program (in this subsection referred to as the “program”) to—

(A) market the loans available under section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(3)) to Reservists, and family members of Reservists, that are on active duty and that are not on active duty; and

(B) provide technical assistance to a small business concern applying for a loan under that section.

(2) COMPONENTS.—The program shall—

(A) incorporate appropriate websites maintained by the Administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Defense; and

(B) require that information on the program is made available to small business concerns directly through—

(i) the district offices and resource partners of the Administration, including small business development centers, women's business centers, and the Service Corps of Retired Executives; and

(ii) other Federal agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.

(3) REPORT.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, and every 6 months thereafter until the date that is 30 months after such date of enactment, the Administrator shall submit to Congress a report on the status of the program.

(B) CONTENTS.—Each report submitted under subparagraph (A) shall include—

(i) for the 6-month period ending on the date of that report—

(1) the number of loans approved under section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(3));

(II) the number of loans disbursed under that section; and

(III) the total amount disbursed under that section; and

(ii) recommendations, if any, to make the program more effective in serving small business concerns that employ Reservists.

SEC. 202. RESERVIST LOANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator and the Secretary of Defense shall develop a joint website and printed materials providing information regarding any program for small business concerns that is available to veterans or Reservists.

(b) MARKETING.—The Administrator is authorized—

(1) to advertise and promote the program under section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act jointly with the Secretary of Defense and veterans' service organizations; and

(2) to advertise and promote participation by lenders in such program jointly with trade associations for banks or other lending institutions.

SEC. 203. NONCOLLATERALIZED LOANS.

Section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(3)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(G)(i) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Administrator may make a loan under this paragraph of not more than \$50,000 without collateral.

“(ii) The Administrator may defer payment of principal and interest on a loan described in clause (i) during the longer of—

“(I) the 1-year period beginning on the date of the initial disbursement of the loan; and

“(II) the period during which the relevant essential employee is on active duty.”.

SEC. 204. LOAN PRIORITY.

Section 7(b)(3) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(3)), as amended by this Act, is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(H) The Administrator shall give priority to any application for a loan under this paragraph and shall process and make a determination regarding such applications prior to processing or

making a determination on other loan applications under this subsection, on a rolling basis.”.

SEC. 205. RELIEF FROM TIME LIMITATIONS FOR VETERAN-OWNED SMALL BUSINESSES.

Section 3(q) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632(q)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(5) RELIEF FROM TIME LIMITATIONS.—

“(A) IN GENERAL.—Any time limitation on any qualification, certification, or period of participation imposed under this Act on any program that is available to small business concerns shall be extended for a small business concern that—

“(i) is owned and controlled by—

“(I) a veteran who was called or ordered to active duty under a provision of law specified in section 101(a)(13)(B) of title 10, United States Code, on or after September 11, 2001; or

“(II) a service-disabled veteran who became such a veteran due to an injury or illness incurred or aggravated in the active military, naval, or air service during a period of active duty pursuant to a call or order to active duty under a provision of law referred to in subclause (I) on or after September 11, 2001; and

“(ii) was subject to the time limitation during such period of active duty.

“(B) DURATION.—Upon submission of proper documentation to the Administrator, the extension of a time limitation under subparagraph (A) shall be equal to the period of time that such veteran who owned or controlled such a concern was on active duty as described in that subparagraph.

“(C) EXCEPTION FOR PROGRAMS SUBJECT TO FEDERAL CREDIT REFORM ACT OF 1990.—The provisions of subparagraphs (A) and (B) shall not apply to any programs subject to the Federal Credit Reform Act of 1990 (2 U.S.C. 661 et seq.).”.

SEC. 206. SERVICE-DISABLED VETERANS.

Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship of the Senate and the Committee on Small Business of the House of Representatives a report describing—

(1) the types of assistance needed by service-disabled veterans who wish to become entrepreneurs; and

(2) any resources that would assist such service-disabled veterans.

SEC. 207. STUDY ON OPTIONS FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE WORKING RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND THEIR RESERVE COMPONENT EMPLOYEES.

(a) STUDY REQUIRED.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study on options for promoting positive working relations between employers and Reserve component employees of such employers, including assessing options for improving the time in which employers of Reservists are notified of the call or order of such members to active duty other than for training.

(b) REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report on the study conducted under subsection (a).

(2) CONTENTS.—The report submitted under paragraph (1) shall—

(A) provide a quantitative and qualitative assessment of—

(i) what measures, if any, are being taken to inform Reservists of the obligations and responsibilities of such members to their employers;

(ii) how effective such measures have been; and

(iii) whether there are additional measures that could be taken to promote positive working relations between Reservists and their employers, including any steps that could be taken to ensure that employers are timely notified of a call to active duty; and

(B) assess whether there has been a reduction in the hiring of Reservists by business concerns because of—

(i) any increase in the use of Reservists after September 11, 2001; or

(ii) any change in any policy of the Department of Defense relating to Reservists after September 11, 2001.

(c) **APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS DEFINED.**—In this section, the term “appropriate committees of Congress” means—

(1) the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship of the Senate; and

(2) the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Small Business of the House of Representatives.

SEC. 208. INCREASED VETERAN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM.

Section 7(a) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(a)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(32) **INCREASED VETERAN PARTICIPATION PROGRAM.**—

“(A) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this paragraph—

“(i) the term ‘cost’ has the meaning given that term in section 502 of the Federal Credit Reform Act of 1990 (2 U.S.C. 661a);

“(ii) the term ‘pilot program’ means the pilot program established under subparagraph (B); and

“(iii) the term ‘veteran participation loan’ means a loan made under this subsection to a small business concern owned and controlled by veterans of the Armed Forces or members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces.

“(B) **ESTABLISHMENT.**—The Administrator shall establish and carry out a pilot program under which the Administrator shall reduce the fees for veteran participation loans.

“(C) **DURATION.**—The pilot program shall terminate at the end of the second full fiscal year after the date that the Administrator establishes the pilot program.

“(D) **MAXIMUM PARTICIPATION.**—A veteran participation loan shall include the maximum participation levels by the Administrator permitted for loans made under this subsection.

“(E) **FEEES.**—

“(i) **IN GENERAL.**—The fee on a veteran participation loan shall be equal to 50 percent of the fee otherwise applicable to that loan under paragraph (18).

“(ii) **WAIVER.**—The Administrator may waive clause (i) for a fiscal year if—

“(I) for the fiscal year before that fiscal year, the annual estimated rate of default of veteran participation loans exceeds that of loans made under this subsection that are not veteran participation loans;

“(II) the cost to the Administration of making loans under this subsection is greater than zero and such cost is directly attributable to the cost of making veteran participation loans; and

“(III) no additional sources of revenue authority are available to reduce the cost of making loans under this subsection to zero.

“(iii) **EFFECT OF WAIVER.**—If the Administrator waives the reduction of fees under clause (ii), the Administrator—

“(I) shall not assess or collect fees in an amount greater than necessary to ensure that the cost of the program under this subsection is not greater than zero; and

“(II) shall reinstate the fee reductions under clause (i) when the conditions in clause (ii) no longer apply.

“(iv) **NO INCREASE OF FEES.**—The Administrator shall not increase the fees under paragraph (18) on loans made under this subsection that are not veteran participation loans as a direct result of the pilot program.

“(F) **GAO REPORT.**—

“(i) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 1 year after the date that the pilot program terminates, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to the Committee on Small Business of the House of Representatives and the Committee

on Small Business and Entrepreneurship of the Senate a report on the pilot program.

“(ii) **CONTENTS.**—The report submitted under clause (i) shall include—

“(I) the number of veteran participation loans for which fees were reduced under the pilot program;

“(II) a description of the impact of the pilot program on the program under this subsection;

“(III) an evaluation of the efficacy and potential fraud and abuse of the pilot program; and

“(IV) recommendations for improving the pilot program.”.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment and that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I am pleased to see the Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act of 2008, a bill that Senator SNOWE and I developed, pass the Senate today. Veterans have sacrificed in the defense of our country, and they have earned the support of their Government in reentering civilian life. Senators HAGEL, CANTWELL, LANDRIEU, LIEBERMAN, and TESTER are cosponsors of this bill.

There are currently 24 million veterans in America, including over 1.3 million who have left military service since 2001. As the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, it becomes increasingly vital that returning servicemembers receive the assistance they need to reenter civilian life. According to the Department of Labor, the unemployment rate among recently discharged veterans is more than double the national overall unemployment rate: 11.9 percent compared to 4.6 percent. In addition, 55 percent of self-employed reservists experienced income loss when deployed, and 22 percent said that their business suffered serious or very serious harm.

As chairman of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, addressing the concerns of veteran entrepreneurs remains a top priority. In January 2007, the committee's first hearing, “Assessing Federal Small Business Assistance Programs for Veterans and Reservists,” looked at the issues facing veterans who wish to start or grow a small business. In March, the committee released a report, “The State of Veteran Entrepreneurship” which described the issues facing veterans and listed a series of recommendations to fix those problems. The Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act of 2008 is based on those recommendations.

Senator SNOWE and I introduced S. 1784, the Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act of 2007, on July 12, 2007. In September, that bill was added by unanimous consent as an amendment to the Department of Defense authorization bill; however, unfortunately, it was dropped in the final con-

ference negotiations. In November, after working closely to address concerns of other Members of the Senate, the bill passed the Senate by unanimous consent again, and the House took up the measure on January 16. An amended version passed the House on the same day, and the amended bill was passed by the Senate today. The House changes included removing a study looking at the tax and regulatory barriers facing veterans and reinserting Senate language requiring veteran and military service organizations to serve on a new interagency task force. Although this bill has changed from what I envisioned many months ago, it is an important step forward in supporting the American dream of business ownership for veterans and reservists, and I am gratified to see it pass the Senate and urge the President to sign it as quickly as possible.

The Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act of 2007 takes a number of steps to improve the Government's role in supporting our veterans. Specifically, it reauthorizes the veterans programs in the Small Business Administration. This legislation increases the funding authorization for the Office of Veteran Business Development from \$2 million today to \$2.3 million over 2 years. In light of the large numbers of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and increased responsibilities placed on this office by Executive Order 13360, it is high time that the Office of Veteran Business Development receive the funding levels that it needs.

The bill also creates an interagency task force to improve coordination between agencies in administering veteran small business programs. One of the biggest complaints that our committee heard at its hearing last January was that Federal agencies do not work together in reaching out to veterans and informing them about small business programs. This task force will focus on increasing veterans' small business success, including procurement and franchising opportunities, access to capital, and other types of business development assistance.

This bill also permanently extends the SBA Advisory Committee on Veterans Business Affairs. The committee was created to serve as an independent source of advice and policy recommendations to the SBA, the Congress, and the President. The veteran small business owners who serve on this committee provide a unique perspective, which is sorely needed at this challenging time. Unfortunately, continuing uncertainty about the committee's future has, at times, distracted the committee from focusing on its core function. Therefore, I have called for its permanent extension. It is clear to me that more needs to be done to address the issues facing veterans and reservists, and the role this committee plays will continue to be important.

Additionally, I have taken a number of steps to better serve the reservists

who are serving their country abroad while their businesses are suffering at home. Over the past decade, the Department of Defense has increased its reliance on the National Guard and Reserves. This has intensified since September 11, and increased deployments are expected to continue. The effect of this increase on reservists and small businesses continues to remain of concern. A 2003 GAO report indicated that 41 percent of reservists lost income when mobilized. This had a higher effect on self-employed reservists, 55 percent of whom lost income.

In 1999, I created the Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loan, MREIDL, program to provide loans to small businesses that incur economic injury as result of an essential employee being called to active duty. However, since 2002, fewer than 300 of these loans have been approved by the SBA, despite record numbers of reservists being called to active duty. It is clear that changes need to be made, so that reservists are informed about the availability of the MREIDL program and that the program better meets their needs. At our hearing last January, we heard suggestions for a number of changes, which would improve the Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loan program, and I have included those changes in this bill. They include increasing the application deadline for such a loan from 90 days to 1 year following the date of discharge, creating a predeployment loan approval process, and improved outreach and technical assistance.

This bill also increases to \$50,000 the amount SBA can disburse without requiring collateral under the MREIDL program. Reservist families have already sacrificed enough when a family member is called to serve their country. They should not have to forfeit the success of their business and their livelihood as well. This loan program would allow reservist-dependent businesses to access the capital they need to stay afloat without having to sacrifice beyond the service of the key employees. In order to give reservists time to repay the loans, the noncollateralized loan created in this bill would not accumulate interest or require payments for 1 year or until after the deployment ends, whichever is longer.

There are two more provisions, which will help this Nation's servicemembers. One section of the bill will require the SBA to give priority to MREIDL loans during loan processing. Another provision will give activated servicemembers an extension of any SBA time limitations equal to the time spent on active duty. This will make it easier for

servicemembers to serve their country while continuing to meet their obligations at home.

Lastly, this bill calls for two reports. One report will look at the needs of service-disabled veterans who are interested in becoming entrepreneurs. As a result of the war on terror and improved medicine, we are seeing more service-disabled veterans than we have seen in decades. For some service-disabled veterans, entrepreneurship is the best or only way of achieving economic independence. Therefore, it is essential that we understand and take steps to address the needs of the service-disabled veteran entrepreneur or small business owner.

This bill also calls for a study to investigate how to improve relations between reservists and their employers. In January, the committee heard that recent changes by the Department of Defense to policies regulating the length and frequency of reservist deployments is harming the ability of reservists to find jobs and the ability of small business owners to continue hiring them. Understanding more about this issue is important and essential to making sure that policymakers can continue to support citizen soldiers and the small businesses that employ them.

The bill also includes a number of other important provisions that were added by the House. For instance, this bill includes language directing the Office of Veterans Business Development to increase the number of Veterans Business Outreach Centers and requires them to improve their participation in the Transition Assistance Program. This bill also creates a program reducing 7(a) loan fees for veterans, improves Small Business Development Centers outreach to the veteran community, and instructs the Associate Administrator of the Office of Veterans Business Development to create and disseminate information aimed at informing women veterans about the resources available to them. I am pleased that the House and Senate were able to come to an agreement on these provisions.

Veterans possess great technical skills and valuable leadership experience, but they require financial resources and small business training to turn that potential into a viable enterprise. A recent report by the Small Business Administration stated that 22 percent of veterans plan to start or are starting a business when they leave the military. For service-disabled veterans, this number rises to 28 percent.

We owe veterans and reservists more than a simple thank you for their service. The least we can do is provide critical resources to help them start and

grow small business and to hold Federal agencies accountable. That is what our bill does.

APPOINTMENT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair, on behalf of the Vice President, pursuant to Section 5 of Title I of Division H of Public Law 110-161, appoints the following Senator as Chairman of the U.S.-Japan Interparliamentary Group conference for the 110th Congress: The Honorable DANIEL K. INOUE of Hawaii.

ORDERS FOR MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2008

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it stand adjourned until 2 p.m., Monday, February 4; that following the prayer and pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed expired, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and the Senate resume consideration of S. 2248, the FISA legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROGRAM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, on Monday, the Senate will resume consideration of the FISA legislation, and at 5:30 p.m., the Senate will proceed to vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 5140, the Economic Stimulus bill. Senators should be aware that additional votes will occur following the 5:30 cloture vote. Those votes would be in relation to the FISA legislation.

I understand there may be some problems with Republicans wanting any votes that afternoon, but we will work on that Monday. At least we have agreement on this legislation, and I see no reason, if we can't take a big chunk out of it on Monday, which I think we can, we can finish it on Tuesday.

Mr. President, I thank everybody for all their good work this week.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2008, AT 2 P.M.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand adjourned under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 8:20 p.m., adjourned until Monday, February 4, 2008, at 2 p.m.