

longevity by detailing how it should supervise a file review.

Additionally, this legislation requires the SBA to provide clear direction to certified development companies as they navigate environmental rules and regulations.

Lastly, this will help ensure that the program continues to operate on the fees built into the program.

I am confident that these improvements will strengthen the program for both small businesses and the program's lending partners. This legislation is a step in the right direction to ensure that small businesses can thrive as they bring innovative goods and services to consumers around the country.

I want to, again, thank Congresswoman CRAIG, Chairwoman VELÁZQUEZ, and Ranking Member CHABOT for their work and their help on this legislation. I urge my colleagues to support it.

□ 1545

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers on my side, so I am happy to close.

Mr. Speaker, Congress must continue to work together to strengthen the SBA's existing guaranteed loan programs. The SBA's programs must work for the Nation's smallest firms and the Nation's taxpayers. H.R. 8199 meets both objectives by applying appropriate oversight requirements to the SBA's 504/CDC loan program. Therefore, I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I, once again, thank Ms. CRAIG and Mr. BISHOP for their leadership, and I thank the chairwoman for her leadership on this. I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, since its inception, SBA's 504 program has enabled thousands of businesses to hire employees, grow to more locations, and expand operations. These 504 loans are some of the most affordable for commercial real estate projects, and most only require a 10 percent down payment from small business owners. In its 62-year history, it has proven to be a strong-performing SBA program that has helped entrepreneurs create jobs in every corner of our country.

Thanks to Mr. BISHOP and Ms. CRAIG's efforts, the bill before us today will make commonsense improvements to this important program. By shifting all loan closing file review responsibilities to the Office of Credit Risk Management, program integrity will be preserved, and the 504 program will be an affordable financing option for the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes," and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 8199, 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.

PARITY FOR HUBZONE APPEALS ACT OF 2020

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 8229) to require the Administrator of the Small Business Administration to issue a rule authorizing the Office of Hearings and Appeals to decide appeals relating to the status of HUBZone business concerns, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 8229

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 "Parity for HUBZone Appeals Act of 2020".

SEC. 2. AUTHORITY FOR THE OFFICE OF HEARINGS AND APPEALS TO DECIDE APPEALS RELATING TO QUALIFIED HUBZONE SMALL BUSINESS CONCERNS.

Not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Small Business Administration shall issue a rule authorizing the Office of Hearings and Appeals of the Administration to decide all appeals from formal protest determinations in connection with the status of a concern as qualified HUBZone small business concern (as such term is defined in section 31(b) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 657a(b))).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

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

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

There was no objection.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 8229, the Parity for HUBZone Appeals Act of 2020, introduced by the gentlewoman from American Samoa (Mrs. RADEWAGEN) and the gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. HOULAHAN).

H.R. 8229 will grant SBA's Office of Hearings and Appeals jurisdiction over appeals of HUBZone eligibility determinations. The Office of Hearings and Appeals provides independent quasi-judicial review of certain SBA program decisions. Under current law, the office decides appeals of eligibility deter-

minations in the women-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned small business contracting programs, but it does not review appeals for the HUBZone program. That process is different.

When a protest challenging a HUBZone designation is filed, SBA's HUBZone director will review and make a decision. If the decision is appealed, the head of the Office of Government Contracting and Business Development will review and render a decision, which is final.

By shifting HUBZone eligibility appeals to the Office of Hearings and Appeals, H.R. 8229 achieves priority and uniformity in SBA's contracting programs. Moreover, it promotes transparency since the office's decisions are published.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 8229, the Parity for HUBZone Appeals Act of 2020.

As we have heard from the chairwoman, the current appeals process for the HUBZone program raises several concerns, including questions of conflict of interest, lack of transparency, and lack of responsibility.

The AA-GCBD plays a key leadership role within the organizational structure of the SBA and is primarily responsible for the supervision of all the SBA's various Federal contracting programs, including the HUBZone program.

Unlike the AA-GCBD, the SBA's Office of Hearings and Appeals is a fully functioning independent organization unconnected to the SBA's Federal contracting programs, and OHA administrative judges are trained to hear exactly these types of matters.

By moving HUBZone appeals from the AA-GCBD's purview to OHA through the passage of this bill, the AA-GCBD will be empowered to focus on its primary supervisory responsibilities while HUBZone small businesses will be able to receive impartial, fair, and knowledgeable treatment of their cases by OHA.

H.R. 8229, this bill, makes a necessary correction in the way HUBZone appeals are conducted.

I thank the gentlewoman from American Samoa (Mrs. RADEWAGEN), our vice ranking member, as well as the gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. HOULAHAN) for their bipartisan leadership on this legislation—again, Republicans and Democrats working together on this committee.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from American Samoa (Mrs. RADEWAGEN).

Mrs. RADEWAGEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank Ranking Member CHABOT for yielding time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 8229, the Parity for HUBZone Appeals

Act of 2020. I thank Ms. HOULAHAN for her collaboration on this important legislation.

SBA's various small business contracting programs support different types of entrepreneurs, from women and service-disabled veterans to minorities and the economically disadvantaged, by providing these businesses with special Federal contracting preferences.

Whether a business holds a specific status is critical in determining whether that company is eligible to compete for these special contract opportunities. Not only does the business have a vested interest in obtaining and maintaining its status, but the Federal Government also has an interest in making sure these special contracts are not awarded to fraudulent firms. If a company is suspected to be ineligible for a status it claims to hold, an interested party can protest the firm's status.

Currently, for Historically Underutilized Business Zone-qualified, or HUBZone-qualified, small businesses, the final arbiter of a firm's special HUBZone status is the Associate Administrator of the Office of Government Contracting and Business Development, or AA-GCBD. This differs significantly from SBA's other Federal contracting programs in which SBA's Office of Hearings and Appeals, or OHA, is the final decisionmaker of a firm's protested status.

OHA, unlike the AA-GCBD, is an independent office of the SBA. Leaving the appeal decision to the AA-GCBD raises questions of conflict of interest, whereas housing that process at OHA will ensure the decision remains separate and independent from any influence.

Furthermore, the AA-GCBD has many competing priorities and responsibilities in overseeing all the SBA's Federal contracting programs. In contrast, OHA administrative judges are primarily tasked with adjudicating similar types of appeals and, thus, are well trained and well versed in making educated decisions objectively and impartially. Thus, passage of this bill means that small businesses will have a greater chance of having a fair and knowledgeable assessment of their case.

Finally, the AA-GCBD's appeals decisions are currently made in a vacuum. There is no visibility into the reasons why a decision was reached. In contrast, all of OHA's decisions are published online and easily searchable. These opinions are critical for small businesses to obtain a greater understanding of the rules surrounding their eligibility. Therefore, shifting the responsibility to hear HUBZone appeals to OHA will provide the public with much-needed guidance and transparency.

In sum, H.R. 8229 will bring greater parity, fairness, and transparency between SBA's HUBZone program and its other Federal contracting programs.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation.

Mr. CHABOT. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers on my side, and I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, this is good legislation. It moves the ball forward. Moving the HUBZone appeals process to the OHA places small businesses that have a complaint about the program on equal footing with other appeals processes throughout the SBA, and that is a good thing.

I want to, again, thank Mrs. RADEWAGEN for her leadership on this particular legislation and Ms. HOULAHAN from Pennsylvania as well, and the chairwoman, as always, for working in a bipartisan manner.

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

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, we all know consistent procedures in government foster a better understanding of the rules and improve overall agency effectiveness.

H.R. 8229 furthers that ideal by providing the HUBZone program with parity and uniformity with the women-owned and the service-disabled veteran-owned programs.

Furthermore, by making the Office of Hearings and Appeals the final arbiter of all protest eligibility determinations, H.R. 8229 capitalizes on everything the office has to offer: subject matter expertise, efficiency, and transparency.

I thank Mrs. RADEWAGEN and Ms. HOULAHAN for working together on this bipartisan solution.

Lastly, I would like to take a moment to thank the ranking member, Mr. CHABOT, for his outstanding service on the Small Business Committee.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. CHABOT and I have led this committee together through four Congresses, each of us spending equal time as chair and ranking member. Throughout it all, he has been an incredible partner, working closely with me in good times and bad.

Over the course of our tenure, we have shepherded scores of bipartisan bills through the House, giving small businesses better access to capital, counseling, and Federal contracts. We have held numerous oversight hearings to make sure SBA programs were operating effectively and efficiently for small businesses, regardless of which party held the White House. In sum, we worked very well together.

□ 1600

You may ask what is the secret to our success, especially during these polarizing times. And I will point to Representative CHABOT, who is as committed to public service as I am. He puts politics aside and works with Democrats and Republicans alike to solve problems.

When the pandemic struck, it hit small businesses particularly hard, and our committee was called to action. Small businesses that were once thriving were fighting for their very sur-

vival. Our committee was working day and night, trying to develop a bipartisan package in mere days that will provide economic relief to small businesses. These were trying economic times, and we needed to bring people together and act fast to rescue small businesses. It wasn't easy, but one thing was certain. I was fortunate to have Ranking Member CHABOT by my side.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the relief we have been able to deliver to our Main Street small businesses. I would also be remiss if I didn't mention Ranking Member CHABOT's excellent staff, who have worked tirelessly with us. I thank Kevin Fitzpatrick, Jan Oliver, Joe Hartz, Rob Yavor, Vivian Ling, Delia Barr, Alison Kerman, and Rachel Emmons for their commitment and dedication. They have worked hand in glove with my staff to ensure hearings went well and the pandemic relief programs were working as intended.

Mr. Speaker, I am saddened that Ranking Member CHABOT will not be returning to the committee as ranking member in the next Congress. I will certainly miss our conversations during hearings and listening to the many unique ways his name is pronounced. I thought my name was tough.

Steve, you will be sorely missed. Thank you for your leadership, dedication, and willingness to work across the aisle to make our world a little bit brighter. I wish you the very best in the next Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 8229, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 8229.

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.

GANDHI-KING SCHOLARLY EXCHANGE INITIATIVE ACT

Mr. ENGEL. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5517) to affirm the friendship of the governments of the United States of America and the Republic of India, and to establish a bilateral partnership for collaboration to advance development and shared values, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5517

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 "Gandhi-King Scholarly Exchange Initiative Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) The peoples of the United States and India have a long history of friendship and