

Madam Speaker, I also thank my friend and colleague from Washington (Ms. PEREZ) for her support on this important legislation.

Small businesses across the United States have a problem. Despite government agencies setting aside contract opportunities for small businesses, participation in Federal contracting has plummeted by 50 percent over just the past decade.

Small businesses are the backbone of our economy. They are the innovators, the job creators, and the driving force behind economic growth.

In Minnesota, small businesses account for over 99 percent of all businesses and employ over half of the workforce. It is no exaggeration to say that the success of our economy is tied to the success of our small businesses.

The Federal Government is the largest purchaser of goods and services in the world, and there is no better way for the government to support small businesses than to ensure they have every opportunity to contract with it.

The scorecard system, which is used to determine if the government is doing a good job contracting with small businesses, needs improvement. Agencies are graded on the total number and value of small business contracts, yet they do not factor in small businesses who won a Federal contract for the first time.

Without incorporating this into the agency scorecard grade, we have no ability to tell whether the pool of small businesses are first-time contractors or multiyear contractors. If the government continuously rewards the same firms time and time again, a new small business that has a more efficient, less expensive way of doing things may be discouraged from entering the marketplace altogether.

My bill, the SPUR Act, addresses this concern. It will require the SBA to account for the number of new entrants into the Federal procurement space when it grades agencies for use in its scorecard. Too many Federal agencies fall short of their goals for awarding contracts to small businesses, leaving billions of dollars in contracts out of reach of American small businesses and increasing the cost for taxpayers.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on the SPUR Act.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. PEREZ), the cosponsor of the legislation.

Ms. PEREZ. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the SPUR Act. I thank my colleague from Minnesota (Mr. STAUBER) for introducing this bill.

The SBA is ensuring that small businesses are given a fair shot at competing for Federal contracting dollars. SBA publishes an annual small business procurement scorecard that grades each Federal agency on their spending toward the goal and gives agencies a score for their performance.

We all know that these Federal contracts can be an incredible financial opportunity for our Nation's entrepreneurs, but even though the amount of dollars awarded to small businesses has reached record highs, the number of small businesses in the industrial base has declined dramatically.

Put simply, the Federal Government is not retaining current small business government contractors, and new small businesses are not choosing to enter the Federal market. This is a serious problem.

For our local economies to thrive, it is important that we level the playing field and ensure that more southwest Washington small businesses can benefit from these opportunities. This bill would require the SBA to include the number of new entrants into the Federal market in the methodology for scoring each Federal agency's small business performance.

By way of example, after the 2020 pandemic hit, my husband and I spent basically the better part of a year on upgrades to our auto shop, including investments in infrastructure, like ventilation systems to keep our employees and our customers safe.

Our friends, who own another auto repair shop, instead spent the entire year learning how to navigate the contract system with the city. This is a perfect example of how it is a real loss to our communities and our local economies when small business owners have to spend a year navigating a bureaucracy and figuring out how to do business with the government.

Our bill will help shed light on how successful Federal agencies are at making sure that new businesses see the value in contracting with the Federal Government and have the capacity to overcome the regulatory burdens to tap into these resources.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to co-lead this bill with Representative STAUBER, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for closing.

Madam Speaker, at the Department of Defense, GAO found that, over a 10-year period, the number of small businesses participating in the defense industrial base declined by over 40 percent. The civilian agencies are seeing a similar decline.

As a result, questions have been raised about how to accurately measure the health of the industrial base and the scorecard's effectiveness for tracking small business contracting. The scorecard's current criteria include a year-over-year prime contract comparison goal, but it fails to count the award of a contract for the first time.

This bill is intended to measure and include in the SBA's methodology for calculating an agency's score for small business goals the number of small businesses who are becoming Federal Government contractors for the first time.

By requiring a year-over-year comparison of new entrants rather than a single target, Federal agencies will be compelled to continuously focus on bringing in new companies and addressing the barriers, like contract size, that prevent greater small business participation.

I again applaud the work put into this legislation. It is a thoughtful product of bipartisan work.

Madam Speaker, I thank Mr. STAUBER and Ms. PEREZ, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Speaker, we must ensure that a greater number of small businesses are entering the government contracting space. By forcing agencies to recognize the shortcomings in awarding contracts to first-time suppliers of the Federal Government, I am hopeful that these numbers will begin to move back in the right direction.

Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. WILLIAMS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 7988.

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.

#### ThinkDIFFERENTLY ABOUT DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT ACT

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7989) to provide for a memorandum of understanding between the Small Business Administration and the National Council on Disability to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7989

*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 "ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act".

#### SEC. 2. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator of the Small Business Administration, in consultation with the Chair of the National Council on Disability, shall—

(1) provide assistance to individuals with disabilities who desire to become entrepreneurs or to be self-employed;

(2) help individuals with disabilities find employment at small business concerns (as defined under section 3 of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 632));

(3) assist small business concerns with hiring individuals with disabilities and with accessibility issues applicable to individuals with disabilities.

(b) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING OR AGREEMENT.—The Administrator, in consultation with the Chair, shall carry out and coordinate the activities described in subsection (a) by entering into one or more memoranda of understanding or other appropriate agreements.

(c) OUTREACH AND EDUCATION.—In carrying out the activities described in subsection (a), the Administrator, in consultation with the Chair, shall conduct outreach and education about such activities.

(d) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator, in consultation with the Chair, shall submit to Congress a report on activities carried out pursuant to any memorandum or agreement described in subsection (b) that includes the following:

(1) A description of how the Administrator, in consultation with the Chair, carried out such activities.

(2) An analysis of opportunities to expand the technical capabilities of the Small Business Administration in carrying out such activities.

(3) A description of achievements under any such memorandum or agreement.

(4) A description of the plans of the Administrator, in consultation with the Chair, to continue activities to expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

#### SEC. 3. COMPLIANCE WITH CUTGO.

No additional amounts are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act or the amendments made by this Act.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam 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 this bill.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 7989, the ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act.

Individuals with disabilities are more likely to be self-employed than the average American, and across the Federal Government, there are numerous programs and resources to assist American small businesses. Yet, many of these resources are not tailored to entrepreneurs with disabilities.

In order to ensure that we are not leaving behind this population, this bill will increase coordination between the SBA and the National Council on Disability. The National Council on Disability is an independent Federal agency whose mission is to provide recommendations to policymakers on

issues impacting individuals with disabilities. This bipartisan council is uniquely qualified to advise and assist the SBA in their pursuit of assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve the American Dream.

I thank Representatives MOLINARO and PAPPAS for their commitment to ensuring Congress works to pave the way to success for entrepreneurs and employees with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to vote “yes” on this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I thank Representatives MOLINARO and PAPPAS for introducing the ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act.

Earlier in the year, our committee heard testimony about the importance of supporting individuals with disabilities. Not only do they have the skills and desire to work, but hiring people with disabilities directly benefits the company they work for and the overall economy.

Through this bipartisan legislation, the SBA can collaborate with the National Council on Disability to help employers hire people with disabilities and provide much-needed support to these entrepreneurs.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New York (Mr. MOLINARO).

Mr. MOLINARO. Madam Speaker, I thank Chairman WILLIAMS for supporting this legislation.

Madam Speaker, I rise today to support the ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act.

This is yet one more piece of legislation the House is taking up to build off the work that we began when I served as county executive, our ThinkDIFFERENTLY initiative. I thank Representative CHRIS PAPPAS for not only his support and cosponsorship of the legislation but his partnership on issues of significance to those living with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities.

The ThinkDIFFERENTLY initiative is a call to action. It is now a national model seeking to break down barriers and create opportunities for those living with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities. The ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act does just that.

The bill requires cooperation between the SBA and the National Council on Disability to expand employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for our disability community. Reports have shown and we know that nearly 70 percent of those living with intellectual, physical, and developmental disabilities are unemployed. They are relegated to the sidelines.

Too many overlook the immense potential our disability community has, especially when it comes to supporting Main Street. Some believe that certain people can't achieve certain things because they presume that they can't. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Employment and entrepreneurship opportunities allow individuals with disabilities not only to sharpen their soft skills and lead more independent lives, but they add value and benefit to employers.

The ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act paves the way for lawmakers to assess the challenges our employees and entrepreneurs with disabilities face while proactively seeking to ensure those with disabilities have the support they need to pursue careers and opportunities of their own.

Again, I thank my colleague Representative PAPPAS for his partnership on this bill. I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense, bipartisan legislation.

Too many living with disabilities are left on the sideline when a simple act of preparing them to enter the workforce or entering the workforce not only transforms and enhances their lives but will advance the work and opportunities with employers and small businesses and certainly work to strengthen the national economy.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. PAPPAS), the cosponsor of the legislation.

Mr. PAPPAS. Madam Speaker, I thank the ranking member and the chair for bringing this legislation to the floor. I rise to urge support of this bipartisan bill that would make needed improvements in the way that Federal partners coordinate and collaborate to support entrepreneurs with disabilities.

The ThinkDIFFERENTLY About Disability Employment Act is a bipartisan piece of legislation I was proud to work on alongside Congressman MOLINARO, and I thank him for his leadership on these issues.

This legislation would require the SBA and the National Council on Disability to collaborate to help people with disabilities pursue small business ownership and employment opportunities.

Specifically, it would require the SBA to report to Congress on the challenges entrepreneurs with disabilities face, better understand current resources available to them, and recommend ways to address the challenges and needs these entrepreneurs have.

I remain committed to working across the aisle on behalf of our small businesses and continuing to bring the voices of our Main Streets to the Halls of Congress to ensure we are meeting their needs and ensure that we are supporting them moving forward in the challenges that they face.

This bipartisan bill is a commonsense step. It is good for people. It is good for small businesses.

Madam Speaker, I thank Congressman MOLINARO, once again, for his leadership, and I urge the House to pass the bill today.

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

Madam Speaker, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 44.1 million Americans are individuals with disabilities. It is important to ensure that all Americans are included and accommodated in the workplace and business community. However, only 26 percent of people with disabilities participate in America's labor force.

One such way to improve these numbers is through entrepreneurship. There are about 1.8 million small businesses owned by people with disabilities in the U.S. Owning a small business is a major pathway for all Americans, especially people with disabilities, to achieve self-sufficiency.

Today's legislation would require the SBA to enter an MOU with the National Council on Disability to promote entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Madam Speaker, I thank Mr. MOLINARO and Mr. PAPPAS for their collaboration, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Madam Speaker, from the start of this Congress, Representative MOLINARO has been a strong advocate for individuals with disabilities. I am thankful for his efforts in the Committee on Small Business to continue his work to ensure Federal resources are being used as effectively as possible so every entrepreneur has a chance to succeed.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. WILLIAMS) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 7989.

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.

#### RURAL SMALL BUSINESS RESILIENCE ACT

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 7984) to require the Administrator of the Small Business Administration to improve access to disaster assistance for individuals located in rural areas, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 7984

*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 "Rural Small Business Resilience Act".

#### SEC. 2. ACCESS TO DISASTER ASSISTANCE FOR INDIVIDUALS LOCATED IN RURAL AREAS.

Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the Small Business Administration shall ensure that the Associate Administrator of the Office of Disaster Recovery and Resilience of the Administration takes such actions as necessary to ensure that individuals located in rural areas (as defined in paragraph (16) of section 7(b) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)(16))) for which a disaster declaration has been made under such section 7(b) have full access to assistance provided under such section, including by providing targeted outreach and marketing materials to such individuals.

#### SEC. 3. TECHNICAL AMENDMENT.

The second paragraph (16) (relating to statute of limitations) of section 7(b) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 636(b)) is redesignated as paragraph (17).

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam 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 bill.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 7984, the Rural Small Business Resilience Act. This legislation would require the SBA to meet communities immediately following a disaster.

It is no secret that Americans in rural communities face different challenges following a disaster than their urban counterparts. It makes sense, then, that a one-size-fits-all outreach plan from the SBA is inadequate.

The GAO confirmed this in their February report, stating individuals in rural areas do not even know assistance is available from the SBA as they try to get back on their feet following a disaster.

The SBA's disaster loan program offers loans to help homeowners, renters, businesses, and nonprofits recover from physical and economic losses following a declared disaster.

I am grateful to Representative PAPPAS and Representative BEAN for introducing this legislation so that rural Americans will have full access to these resources when disaster strikes.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, today we are considering H.R. 7984, which will require the SBA to close out the GAO recommendation, ensuring that individuals in rural areas where a disaster declaration has been made have full access to assistance, including targeted outreach and marketing materials. The SBA will have 1 year to close out the recommendation.

On February 22, 2024, the GAO issued a report examining how the SBA's disaster loan program assists communities after disasters, disaster loan trends in rural and urban areas for fiscal years 2017 to 2022, challenges rural communities face after disasters, and the SBA's actions that address challenges.

The GAO found that rural areas have characteristics that make recovery difficult, and they face challenges in seeking SBA disaster assistance. While the SBA has taken steps to address challenges to recovery, including portable outreach centers, virtual outreach, and a whole-of-SBA approach, this bill prioritizes the SBA's efforts to close out this GAO recommendation and focus on our Nation's rural communities.

Madam Speaker, I commend Mr. PAPPAS and Mr. BEAN for their work on this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WILLIAMS of Texas. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BEAN).

Mr. BEAN of Florida. Madam Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding.

Madam Speaker, summer is right around the corner, and you know what that means: ice cream, going to the pool, going to the beach, baseball, and, unfortunately, hurricane season.

We all know that in baseball, you get three strikes and you are out, but for some small business owners, they could be out with just one major disaster strike.

According to FEMA, 43 percent of small businesses never reopen after a major disaster. An additional 29 percent go out of business within 2 years of the disaster.

That is why, today, I rise in support of H.R. 7984, the Rural Small Business Resilience Act, which I am proud to co-lead along with Representative PAPPAS from the great State of New Hampshire.

This legislation will require the SBA to appropriately tailor marketing and outreach materials to rural communities following a disaster.

In a recent report, the Government Accountability Office, the GAO, found that small businesses in rural communities are not aware of the vital assistance the SBA can provide following a disaster, which could make or break whether they remain open or closed.

The GAO recommends the SBA distinguish their marketing between rural