A recent study showed that the U.S. automotive supply chain alone suffers at least $1 billion in lost productivity due to problems of interoperability. Other industries with complex manufacturing requirements are expected to suffer similar losses, including aerospace, electronics, shipbuilding and construction, to name just a few.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology has supported the first phase of an interoperability program in the auto industry called STEP. In my home State of Michigan, STEP proved to be highly successful and was strongly supported by the auto industry and manufacturers in their supply chain. The provisions of H.R. 4429 build upon this prior experience.

NIST is authorized to perform an assessment to identify critical enterprise integration standards and implementation activities for major manufacturing industries and to report to Congress on the appropriate role for working with industry in this area.

I want to especially this morning thank the Subcommittee on Technology chairwoman, the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA), for the series of hearings that she has held on e-commerce during this past 2-year session. These hearings have brought attention to the challenges facing our small manufacturers as they enter the world of electronic business.

I also want to especially thank the gentleman from Wisconsin (Chairman SENSENBRENNER) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HALL), for their gracious efforts to move this bill through the Committee on Science and bringing it to the floor so expeditiously.

In closing, I believe this bill represents sound and reasonable policy and builds upon the successful track record of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Maryland (Mrs. MORELLA).

Mrs. MORELLA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4429, the Electronic Commerce Enhancement Act of 2000. I want to thank the chairman of the Committee on Science, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER), for helping to bring this bill to the floor. I want to thank the ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HALL), for his yeoman-like work in this. Certainly I value the leadership of the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Technology for the work that he has done and his leadership in helping to forward this very important measure.

During a busy day, most Americans probably do not even stop to think about the daily impact small manufacturing has on our lives; yet it is all but impossible to get through a day without using products that are created by small manufacturers. Everything from the clothes we wear, to the chairs we sit on, to the telecommunications equipment that we use to broadcast these House proceedings live can be attributed in part to the products of small manufacturers.

Small manufacturers make up over 95 percent of all United States manufacturers, and employ one out of every 10 American workers. It is not surprising that small manufacturers contribute so greatly to our Nation's economic growth and prosperity; and in recognition of this vital sector of our economy, we declared last year the year of the small manufacturer.

Last fall, as has been mentioned, the Subcommittee on Technology, which I Chair and on which the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BARCIA) is the ranking member, convened a hearing looking at the challenges and the opportunities facing small and medium-sized manufacturers in the coming decade. As implementing successful electronic commerce strategies emerge is one of the industry's top priorities, it is estimated that sales in electronic commerce alone will reach nearly $3.2 trillion by the year 2003.

Successfully implemented, e-commerce business strategies have the potential to significantly increase productivity and revenues for many small manufacturers. Electronic commerce can help small manufacturers develop new products and markets, while at the same time allowing them to interact more quickly and efficiently with their suppliers and customers.

We had a number of small manufacturers as well as the National Association of Manufacturers testify at our hearing last fall, and they all agreed that we need to address this issue and that the National Institute of Standards and Technology, such a gem in our Federal laboratory system, can play a very important role in helping to achieve that goal.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join in support of the Electronic Commerce Enhancement Act of 2000.

Mr. HALL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. RIVERS).

Ms. RIVERS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of H.R. 4429, a bill that recognizes the importance of the Internet to our economy, and especially the importance of the Internet as a tool in business to business transactions.

Unfortunately, as Internet opportunities opened up, many small and medium-sized manufacturers, who are crucial to our economy, were not able to exploit the potential of e-commerce activities because of problems of interoperability.

The costs of this barrier of interoperability are enormous. According to a recent National Institutes of Standards and Technology study of product data exchange in the automotive sector alone, the inability to inefficiently exchange product data through the automotive supply chain conservatively costs the Internet about $1 billion per year.

This bill would allow the NIST to work with business and industry to develop voluntary standards that will assure that U.S. firms will and can continue to exploit the power of the Internet to collaborate with trading partners and, through greater speed and agility, to participate in global markets.

It also allows for a constructive U.S. role in the development of these standards and for helping equip small businesses with the instruments necessary for this new way of doing business.

I thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. BARCIA) for introducing this important bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

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Mr. HALL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we have no more speakers, and I yield back the balance of our time.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HANSEN). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4429, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read as follows: ''A bill to require the Director of the National Institute of Standards and Technology to assist small and medium-sized manufacturers and other such businesses to successfully integrate and utilize electronic commerce technologies and business practices, and to authorize the National Institute of Standards and Technology to assess critical enterprise integration standards and implementation activities for major manufacturing industries and to develop a plan for enterprise integration for each major manufacturing industry.''.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS REGULATORY ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2000

Mr. SWEENEY. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4946) to amend the Small Business Act to direct the Administrator of the Small Business Administration to establish a pilot program to provide regulatory compliance assistance to small business concerns, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4946

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 ''National Small Business Regulatory Assistance Act of 2000''.

SEC. 2. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this Act is to establish a pilot program to—

(1) provide confidential assistance to small business concerns;

(2) provide small business concerns with the information necessary to improve their rate of compliance with Federal regulations;

(3) create a partnership among Federal agencies to increase outreach efforts to small business concerns with respect to regulatory compliance;

(4) provide a mechanism for unbiased feedback to Federal agencies on the regulatory environment for small business concerns; and

(5) utilize the service delivery network of Small Business Development Centers to improve access of small business concerns to programs to assist them with regulatory compliance.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act, the definitions set forth in section 34(a) of the Small Business Act (as added by section 4 of this Act) shall apply.

SEC. 4. SMALL BUSINESS REGULATORY ASSISTANCE PILOT PROGRAM.

The Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 637 et seq.) is amended—

(1) by redesignating section 34 as section 35; and

(2) by inserting after section 33 the following new section:

"SEC. 34. SMALL BUSINESS REGULATORY ASSISTANCE PILOT PROGRAM.

''(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section, the following definitions apply:

''(1) ADMINISTRATOR.—The term 'Administrator' means the Administrator of the Small Business Administration.

''(2) ASSOCIATION.—The term 'Association' means the association, established pursuant to section 21(a)(3)(A), representing a majority of Small Business Development Centers.

''(3) PARTICIPATING SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER.—The term 'participating Small Business Development Center' means a Small Business Development Center participating in the pilot program.

''(4) PILOT PROGRAM.—The term 'pilot program' means the pilot program established under this section.

''(5) REGULATORY COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE.—The term 'regulatory compliance assistance' means assistance provided by a Small Business Development Center to a small business concern to enable the concern to comply with Federal regulatory requirements.

''(6) SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER.—The term 'Small Business Development Center' means a Small Business Development Center described in section 21.

''(7) STATE.—The term 'State' means each of the several States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam.

''(b) AUTHORITY.—In accordance with this section, the Administrator shall establish a pilot program to provide regulatory compliance assistance to small business concerns through participating Small Business Development Centers, the Association, and Federal compliance partnership programs.

''(c) SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTERS.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot program, the Administrator shall enter into arrangements with participating Small Business Development Centers under which such centers will provide—

''(A) access to information and resources, including current Federal and State nonpunitive compliance and technical assistance programs similar to those established under section 507 of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990;

''(B) training and educational activities;

''(C) confidential, free-of-charge, one-on-one, in-depth counseling to the owners and operators of small business concerns regarding compliance with Federal regulations, provided that such counseling is not considered to be the practice of law in a State in which a Small Business Development Center is located or in which such counseling is conducted;

''(D) technical assistance; and

''(E) referrals to experts and other providers of compliance assistance.

''(2) REPORTS.—

''(A) IN GENERAL.—Each participating Small Business Development Center shall transmit to the Administrator a quarterly report that includes—

''(i) a summary of the regulatory compliance assistance provided by the center under the pilot program; and

''(ii) any data and information obtained by the center from a Federal agency regarding regulatory compliance that the agency intends to be disseminated to small business concerns.

''(B) ELECTRONIC FORM.—Each report referred to in subparagraph (A) shall be transmitted in electronic form.

''(C) INTERIM REPORTS.—During any time period falling between the transmittal of quarterly reports, a participating Small Business Development Center may transmit to the Administrator any interim report containing data or information considered by the center to be necessary or useful.

''(D) LIMITATION ON DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS.—The Administrator may not require a Small Business Development Center to disclose the name or address of any small business concern that received or is receiving assistance under the pilot program, except that the Administrator shall require such a disclosure if ordered to do so by a court in any civil or criminal enforcement action commenced by a Federal or State agency.

''(d) DATA REPOSITORY AND CLEARINGHOUSE.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot program, the Administrator, acting through the office of the Associate Administrator for Small Business Development Centers, shall—

''(A) act as the repository of and clearinghouse for data and information submitted by Small Business Development Centers; and

''(B) transmit to the President and to the Committees on Small Business of the Senate and House of Representatives an annual report that includes—

''(i) a description of the types of assistance provided by participating Small Business Development Centers under the pilot program;

''(ii) data regarding the number of small business concerns that contacted participating Small Business Development Centers regarding assistance under the pilot program;

''(iii) data regarding the number of small business concerns assisted by participating Small Business Development Centers under the pilot program;

''(iv) data and information regarding outreach activities conducted by participating Small Business Development Centers under the pilot program, including any activities conducted in partnership with Federal agencies;

''(v) data and information regarding each case known to the Administrator in which 1 or more Small Business Development Centers offered conflicting advice or information regarding compliance with a Federal regulation to 1 or more small business concerns; and

''(vi) any recommendations for improvements in the regulation of small business concerns.

''(e) ELIGIBILITY.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—A Small Business Development Center shall be eligible to receive assistance under the pilot program only if the center is certified under section 21(k)(2).

''(2) WAIVER.—With respect to a Small Business Development Center seeking assistance under the pilot program, the Administrator may waive the certification requirement set forth in paragraph (1) if the Administrator determines that the center is making a good faith effort to obtain such certification.

''(3) EFFECTIVE DATE.—This subsection shall take effect on October 1, 2000.

''(f) SELECTION OF PARTICIPATING CENTERS.—

''(1) IN GENERAL.—In consultation with the Association and giving substantial weight to the Association's recommendations, the Administrator shall select 2 Small Business Development Centers from each of the following groups of States to participate in the pilot program, except that the Administrator may not select 2 Small Business Development Centers from the same state:

''(A) Group 1: Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Vermont, and Rhode Island.

''(B) Group 2: New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

''(C) Group 3: Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Delaware.

''(D) Group 4: Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

''(E) Group 5: Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

''(F) Group 6: Texas, New Mexico, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana.

''(G) Group 7: Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas.

''(H) Group 8: Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, and Utah.

''(I) Group 9: California, Guam, Hawaii, Nevada, and Arizona.

''(J) Group 10: Washington, Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon.

''(2) DEADLINE FOR SELECTION.—The Administrator shall make selections under this subsection not later than 60 days after promulgation of regulations under section 4.

''(g) MATCHING NOT REQUIRED.—Subparagraphs (A) and (B) of section 21(a)(4) shall not apply to assistance made available under the pilot program.

''(h) EVALUATION AND REPORT.—Not later than 3 years after the establishment of the pilot program, the Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct an evaluation of the pilot program and shall transmit to the Administrator and to the Committees on Small Business of the Senate and House of Representatives a report containing the results of the evaluation along with any recommendations as to whether the pilot program, without or without modification, should be extended to include the participation of all Small Business Development Centers.

''(i) LIMITATION ON USE OF FUNDS.—The Administrator may carry out the pilot program only with amounts appropriated in advance specifically to carry out this section.''.

SEC. 5. PROMULGATION OF REGULATIONS.

After providing notice and an opportunity for comment and after consulting with the Association (but not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act), the Administrator shall promulgate final regulations to carry out this Act, including regulations that establish—

(1) priorities for the types of assistance to be provided under the pilot program;

(2) standards relating to educational, technical, and support services to be provided by participating Small Business Development Centers;

(3) standards relating to any national service delivery and support function to be provided by the Association under the pilot program; and

(4) standards relating to any work plan that the Administrator may require a participating Small Business Development Center to develop.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New York (Mr. SWEENEY).

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to ask my colleagues to support H.R. 4946, the National Small Business Regulatory Assistance Act of 2000.

This bill is intended to assist small business owners in their efforts to comply with the onslaught of Federal regulations which have substantially increased over the past 20 years. H.R. 4946 is designed to utilize the existing infrastructure of Small Business Development Centers to provide regulatory counseling and coordination of Federal regulatory outreach to America's small business community.

We know that the vast majority of small business owners are honest and hard-working people who want to do the right thing. Clearly, this bill is an effort to help these small business owners. Just think, Mr. Speaker, it is highly unlikely that my colleagues or their staffs, or even the staffs of the committees, read the Federal Register on a daily basis. Yet that is what the government asks small business owners to do in order to determine which regulations affect them and what they must do to comply with those regulations.

Let me give an example: The proposed regulation to prevent ergonomic injuries is just 11 pages long; however, OSHA admits that these 11 pages are not self-explanatory and determining the best method of complying will require a small business owner to wade through nearly 1,500 pages of supplemental explanation and economic analysis.

Small business owners want to comply with Federal regulations, but often they simply do not have the time or the expertise to determine how to comply with proposed rules. This causes loss of revenue. Oftentimes, that revenue would be used to grow for jobs. When that happens, Mr. Speaker, it hurts us all.

H.R. 4946, is designed to assist small business owners navigate through the maze of Federal regulations which continue to pour forth from the Federal Government. H.R. 4946 would establish a pilot program in 20 Small Business Development Centers, SBDCs, throughout the United States. These 20 centers would be charged with providing small business owners access to information and resources, including current Federal and State programs designed to provide small business owners with regulatory compliance assistance, training materials and educational activities such as conferences and seminars, confidential free-of-charge one-on-one in-depth counseling regarding compliance assistance, technical assistance, and referral to other experts such as professors in the university or colleges where the participating SBDC is located.

The SBDCs would track information and H.R. 4946, as amended, would provide this information to the administrator of the SBA for collection in a clearinghouse. This will enable Federal agencies and Congress to ensure consistency of regulatory compliance assistance to small business.

The cooperation envisioned by H.R. 4946 is not necessarily new. Some Small Business Development Centers already are thinking outside the box. This bill will, however, help foster those relationships with different Federal agencies.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor with firsthand knowledge of how effective this type of process can be. Before being elected to Congress, I served as the Commissioner of Labor in New York State. I know firsthand the difficulty that exists in trying to balance the needs of running a small business and maintaining a safe working environment and creating jobs.

While I was State Labor Commissioner, I instituted an exhaustive review process that resulted in a 30 percent reduction of outdated, unnecessary, duplicative or oppressive restrictions on New York's businesses.

The result, after that reduction in regulations, Mr. Speaker, was an increase in worker safety, an increase in safety in the workplace.

As a former State regulator, I understand that penalizing first and asking questions later is not necessarily the best use of a regulators' time or their resources. If the pilot programs prove successful, and given my experience in New York, I think they will, then we will be on our way to a win-win situation for all involved.

Mr. Speaker, before closing, let me briefly mention the amendments made to the version reported out of committee. After substantial discussion with small business owners and Small Business Development Center directors, it was determined that certain technical corrections were necessary to fine tune the operation of the pilot programs.

First, the administrator of the SBA will maintain the central clearinghouse of information and make reports to the President and Congress.

Second, to ensure that the assessment of the program is not biased, the General Accounting Office will provide a 3-year review of the program.

And third, H.R. 4946, as amended, will provide significant guidance to the administrator in the development of regulations needed to place the program in operation, but at the same time ensure that the program is not unduly delayed by bureaucratic debate.

H.R. 4946 is a good bill, Mr. Speaker, that passed out of the committee unanimously. I ask my colleagues to support its passage.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my support for H.R. 4946 and commend the gentleman from New York (Mr. SWEENEY) for his work on addressing one of the most pressing issues affecting small businesses, the need for clear and understandable regulations.

Small businesses support safe workplace regulations and the need for a clean environment. They recognize that these regulations are put in place not just for protection of their customers and employees, but to protect the business and the community as a whole. The fact is regulatory issues are a major concern for small businesses. And while this bill relieves some of the regulatory burden, there is more we will need to do to ensure that the process is fair and equitable.

However, what often frustrates them the most is the simple fact that the regulations governing many of these areas have one common and disturbing denominator: They are often too confusing and unload a heavier burden on small businesses. Penalties, I might add, that small businesses cannot afford to fight against, or in some cases pay the stiff fine the regulation often imposes.

To alleviate this problem, some agencies like OSHA, EPA, and IRS provide compliance assistance aimed at helping small businesses. And while these programs are very helpful, many business owners fear that if they seek any compliance assistance from these agencies, their businesses will be left open to possible fines and sanctions without actually understanding the regulation they violated.

To address this problem, the legislation offered by the gentleman from New York sets up a pilot program in partnership the Nation's Small Business Development Centers, SBDCs. It is aimed at assisting small businesses in complying with the array of regulations that exist.

With locations in every community and a reputation for providing solid small business assistance, SBDCs will offer an additional avenue for helping smaller companies understand and comply with regulations. This proposal makes good business sense, both for small companies and for the Federal Government that serves a multitude of interests.

Once again, I would like to commend the gentleman from New York (Mr. SWEENEY) for his work on the committee and on this critical issue.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS).

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I too want to commend and congratulate the gentleman from New York (Mr. SWEENEY) for introducing such a meaningful piece of legislation.

All of us know that small businesses are, indeed, a backbone of the economy in this country. And we also know that as we become more civilized, there is need to protect the workplace and make it as worker friendly as we possibly can, to make it as safe for those who work as we can.

That means standards. In many instance those small businesses have difficulty complying because of not having the person-power to figure out how to comply meaningfully with the regulation. Or they may not have the money, the resources, the cash flow.

This bill provides an opportunity to assist small businesses to be in compliance, to know how to comply, and to do it well. It is a good piece of legislation. Again, I commend the gentleman from New York and urge all Members to support it.

Mr. SWEENEY. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, today, we have taken a big step toward helping businesses deal with the issue of regulatory burden. Unfortunately for many small companies today, the added weight of government regulations can cost many business owners serious long-term financial hardship.

This bill will take a big step toward making regulatory compliance a manageable task for small businesses. However, while this bill achieves a number of objectives, there is more we need to do to provide a better understanding of the entire Federal regulatory system.

Again, I commend the gentleman from New York (Mr. SWEENEY) for his hard work on this bill, and I look forward to working with him and other members of the committee as we move this entire process forward.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

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

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to thank the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELAZQUEZ), my colleague and friend, the ranking member of the committee, for her support throughout this process, as well as the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS). I would just point out that all three of us, as do many of the members of the committee, represent districts that substantially rely on the small business community to create jobs in their areas. Especially those areas in a district like mine that happens to be economically depressed or finding itself at times in real competition as the world changes in terms of the economy.

I also want to thank the gentleman from Missouri (Chairman TALENT) for scheduling a field hearing on this issue and bringing the bill to markup. I want to also thank the Committee on Small Business staff for all of their hard work on this legislation.

I think the Small Business Regulatory Assistance Act of 2000 is an important effort to help small businesses and small business owners comply with Federal regulations. I urge my colleagues to support it. I think this is a job-growing proposition.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mr. SWEENEY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4946, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SWEENEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 4946.

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

There was no objection.

EXPORT WORKING CAPITAL LOAN IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2000

Mr. MANZULLO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4944) to amend the Small Business Act to permit the sale of guaranteed loans made for export purposes before the loans have been fully disbursed to borrowers.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 4944

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 ''Export Working Capital Loan Improvement Act of 2000''.

SEC. 2. SALE OF GUARANTEED LOANS MADE FOR EXPORT PURPOSES.

Section 5(f)(1)(C) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 634(f)(1)(C)) is amended to read as follows:

''(C) each loan, except each loan made under section 7(a)(14), shall have been disbursed to the borrower prior to any sale.''.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. MANZULLO).

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

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4944 makes a technical correction to the Export Working Capital Guarantee Program of the Small Business Administration. The export working capital program provides a 90 percent guarantee for revolving capital needs covering up to $750,000 for small business exporters.

However, this is a very underused program. Only 429 international trade loans were facilitated by this program in 1999. The problem is that the SBA would like to be able to sell these loans on the secondary market. However, secondary market sales of guaranteed loans are conducted infrequently. Current law requires that all 7(a) loans, including export working capital loans, must be fully disbursed to the borrower prior to becoming included in the secondary market sale.

Export working capital loans are often approved, disbursed, and repaid so quickly that they miss the window of opportunity for inclusion in a secondary market sale.

The purpose of the Export Working Capital Loan Improvement Act of 2000 is to exempt export working capital loans from the disbursement requirement under the SBA's 7(a) loan program. This change will allow export working capital loans to be sold to the secondary market. Passage of H.R. 4944 hopefully will free up more trade financing for small business exporters.

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The lack or the complexity of trade finance is a major barrier to small businesses.

Last month, I participated in a forum in Rockford, Illinois, in the district I represent, a forum which was sponsored by the Office of International Trade at the SBA to encourage more local banks to become interested in trade finance. This is a difficult process, because even in this era of globalization, many bankers are still not quite sure how they can be repaid for international loans.

H.R. 4944 will remove the uncertainty for small or international trade loans administered by the SBA. The bill will make trade finance a more attractive option for banks. Increasing the availability of export finance thus will encourage more small businesses to enter into the trade arena.

Mr. Speaker, if my colleagues have seen the recent headlines about U.S. trade deficits hitting another record, we must be concerned, as I am, about our national export strategy. For the month of July, U.S. exports dropped 1.5 percent.

While this bill is surely not a cure-all to this program, it is one small step we can take to encourage more lenders to offer trade finance to small business exporters.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support me and join me in voting for the Export Working Capital Loan Improvement Act of 2000.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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