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ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement

#### Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

#### Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

#### Subcommittee on Technology, Information Policy, Intergovernmental Relations and Procurement Reform

#### Hearing on "Jobs for Wounded Warriors: Increasing Access to Contracts for Service Disabled Veterans"

February 7, 2012

Thank you, Chairman Lankford and Ranking Member Connolly, for convening this hearing today.

The commitment we make to those who wear our nation's uniform must be a lifetime pledge. In exchange for their sacrifice, our soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, and Coast Guard members deserve access to the resources necessary to enable them to return successfully to civilian life.

I am proud to have more than 100 service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses in my district. They contribute not only to the economic success of the State of Maryland, but of the entire nation, providing services to civilian and military clients at Fort Meade, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Andrews Air Force Base, and Patuxent River Naval Air Station.

However, many of my constituents report that the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Program is difficult to navigate. The program has not met its government-wide goal of 3% participation in federal contracting, and only one in five executive agencies meets that target.

At a time when unemployment among veterans of the second Gulf War is 9.1%, meeting this target is more important than ever. Veteran-owned businesses must have access to the contracting opportunities designated for them, and federal agencies must partner with them to bring their leadership and technical skills to more contracts.

There are reasons to believe that change can happen. President Obama established the Interagency Task Force on Veterans Small Business Development to increase access to the resources that business owners need to fully participate in veterans' preference programs.

I am particularly pleased that the number of Veteran Business Outreach Centers has doubled in the last year and that the Veterans Outreach Initiative has reached more than 65,000 individuals.

Also important is the “e-ombudsman” guidance program, which provides training in federal procurement to Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business. The program also trains the federal contracting officials who are vital to enabling federal agencies to meet participation targets.

As we continue to strengthen this program, we must root out any who would try to take advantage of benefits they have not earned. Any firm seeking the veterans’ preference must be qualified to receive that preference. Veterans and taxpayers deserve nothing less than a program that legitimately serves those who have served their country.

My priority is to support rapid implementation of those changes that are necessary to make this program work for our service disabled veterans. I look forward to working with the Chairman and Ranking Member of this subcommittee to strengthen this vital program and expand access to federal contracts for our service-disabled veterans.

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