

STATEMENT OF
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CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION POLICY,
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND PROCUREMENT REFORM
HOUSE OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE

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Good morning Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Connolly, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today in support of our nation's veterans and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses, or SDVOSBs.

I strongly believe that veterans are the segment of society that most deserves our sincere gratitude and assistance, and I am grateful to the brave men and women who have and continue to serve our country. As a 26 year Air Force veteran who also serves on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am aware of the sacrifice and commitment that these brave men and women – in addition to their families at home – endure everyday to protect the freedoms we enjoy as Americans.

Due to advances in medical technology, more of our veterans than ever before are returning home – including many who may not have survived in the past. Now that's good news. But, some of these veterans are coming home severely injured, with PTSD, TBIs, and sometimes with multiple limbs missing. However, you wouldn't believe the positive attitudes of the veterans I've met who have come home with such severe injuries. These veterans want to use their talents to lead meaningful lives despite their condition, and we owe it to them to provide the rehabilitation programs and support they need to be successful.

Speaker Boehner couldn't be more clear when he stated last November, "the men and women who wear the uniform of our Armed Forces deserve our full support when they serve and after they come home, especially now in the middle of a tough economy." With 815,000 veterans unemployed – a number that is far too high – our government needs to act immediately. I am deeply troubled that nearly one in twelve of our nation's heroes are unable to find a job after sacrificing so much for our nation.

Contracting with Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses is just one way in which our government can act now to support these brave warriors. Compared to other

government agencies, the Department of Veterans Affairs is considered to have the best SDVOSB program. According to the Small Business Goaling Report for Fiscal Year 2010, approximately 20 percent of the VA's contracts are going to these worthy veteran-owned businesses. However, VA contracts only account for 30 percent of government contracting – meaning the vast majority of government contracts are not affected by the VA or their SDVOSB program.

Currently, a mere 1.8 percent of Department of Defense contracts are with SDVOSBs. This is unacceptable. The Department of Defense trained these former warriors. They are tremendous assets to our nation because of the experience gained in our Armed Forces. It's time the DoD and other government agencies considered contracting at higher percentages with SDVOSBs.

The VA's SDVOSB program is by no means perfect. As Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, I chaired two hearings last year on this issue. However, I can say with certainty that the VA is attempting to produce positive results in their SDVOSB program. And be assured, I will be keeping track of the VA's progress to reform the SDVOSB program and streamline the certification process to better serve our veterans.

Furthermore, I would argue that instances of fraud within the VA's SDVOSB program warrant a need for other government agencies to also take a look at their SDVOSB contracts. The fact that there are fraudulent companies claiming to be veteran-owned underscores the need to build stronger SDVOSB programs across our government to ensure that our nation's heroes, our veterans, are the ones receiving these contracts.

I believe America would greatly benefit from contracting with more veteran-owned small businesses. Our servicemembers and veterans are highly trained, skilled professionals with a solid work ethic. They have already demonstrated their abilities and dedication to our country. Why wouldn't our government strive to work with an increased number of these upstanding men and women?

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Connolly, thank you again for the opportunity to speak on behalf of our nation's veterans and the need to assist Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses. I am pleased to answer any questions you may have.