



May 17, 2007

Commission on the National Guard and Reserves
2421 S Clark Street
Suite 650
Arlington, VA 22202

Mr. Chairperson, Members of the Committee, distinguished guests.

As a citizen of this great Nation I am honored by the invitation to testify before you today and trust that my ideas and opinions will be considered as we work to continually improve the way we do business in Government and in the public and private sectors.

My name is Christine Bierman, CEO and Founder of Colt Safety, Fire & Rescue located in St. Louis, MO. Colt Safety is first and foremost a 27 year old, quality managed, technically oriented safety products Distribution Company with a mission to protect the American workforce. The added benefit to our clients who understand diversity inclusion is that we are 100% woman owned and operated. Our longevity as a WBE in a historically underrepresented market attests to our business acumen.

I am an advocate for small and diversity businesses and have had the honor of testifying before local, state and Federal committees many times regarding small business and OSHA regulatory issues over the past 20 years.

I am a National Founding Partner of Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), a long time member of National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO), a member of Women Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE).

Small business is the engine that drives the American economy. Women owned business statistics are unique in that we:

- ❖ Represent 38% of all majority-owned, privately held firms in the U.S.
- ❖ Generate \$3.7 trillion dollars in revenues to the U.S. economy
- ❖ Are growing at twice the rate of all U.S. firms
- ❖ Stay in business longer than all other businesses
- ❖ WBE's generally employ a more gender-balanced workforce
- ❖ Are more likely to offer flextime, tuition reimbursement and profit sharing
- ❖ There are an estimated 1.2 million firms owned by women of color equaling 1 in 5 or 20% of all women owned firms
- ❖ Yet Women business owners receive less than 2% of all government contracting and Fortune Company dollars

All statistics are from the Center for Women's Business Research

Since the events of 9/11 our company lost 2 of our 17 employees due to Operation Noble Eagle and Operation Iraqi Freedom. This number represents 20% of our entire work force. We were guided by our attorneys on our responsibility as employers. I also solicited advice from other small business owners. Others were using words like "you do not have to pay their salaries while they are activated" Somehow those words did not sit well with me and we opted to continue Jim Mixco's full salary and benefits during his activation. I realize now that we are the exception to the rule. I also realize now how that decision adversely affected sales, service and overall viability of our small business.

Master Sgt Jaime (Jim) Mixco has been the Director of Technical Sales and Service at Colt since June of 1996. He is a very important and integral part of our organization. He is the lead person on all firefighter gear and highly technical, life saving equipment. In addition he does all our company outreach and quotes for protective gear for our first responders in the WMD and anti-terrorism arena.

Jim is highly trained in the area of WMD and Hazardous Material protocol both from his years at Colt Safety and from the US Air Force as a reservist.

Jim was activated shortly after 9/11 and was stationed just across the River from Colt and his Missouri home as he defended our Nation at Scott Air Force Base, IL. His duty called for him to be 24 hours on and 24 hours off as the citizen soldiers at Scott served as back up to those soldiers fighting terrorism in Afghanistan.

This posed a significant burden on both our small company in addition to the burden it put on his family and personal life. Jim would show up at Colt every other day, coming directly from the Base in his military BDU's (battle dress uniform), change clothes in our locker room, perform his Colt duties, go home and see his family for 4 hours, sleep and be back at Scott Air Force Base by 6 a.m. the following day. This of course repeated throughout his year of duty which EXTENDED to 15 months.

Jim's wife had, at the time a corporate position with an international company which required her to travel often to Spanish speaking countries. Jim and Roxanne have 3 children and Jim is a very "hands on Dad". The youngest child was 10 at the time of activation. This proved to be an extreme burden on Jim's family as the children are exceptionally close and dependent on their father.

Shortly before President Bush declared war on Iraq, Jim was on his annual overseas tour of duty in Saudi Arabia. We can all recall the very intense moments in the weeks leading up to the war as our Leadership gave ultimatums to Saddam Hussein to produce weapons of mass destruction. When Jim phoned to say they were packing up to leave Saudi early, I remember feeling a moment of relief when I asked "does that mean we are not going to war?" and Jim's reply was that he thought it meant that we **were** going to war and they were getting his troops home in order to send in the big guns.

During this time I and our entire company stayed particularly close to Jim's family and let them know we were there for them.

Also during this time, Colt Safety's revenue was directly impacted by Jim's absence. His 24 on 24 off schedule translates to less than 50% duty to Colt Safety. (This does NOT include his annual 3 week tour of duty which we have paid full salary and benefits also for the past 11 years). The sales generated in Jim's technical sales arena, (specifically sales of SCBA's, breathing apparatus, bunker gear and gas monitoring equipment to fire departments) were down 50% for the year Jim was serving under Operation Noble Eagle and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

I was actually in the White House (Indian Treaty Room) the evening of March 19, 2003 when the president declared war on Iraq. As Secretary of Commerce Don Evans was speaking with our group of small businesses and Corporate America, the Secretary made it clear of the history making conversation going on in the "war room" in close proximity to our event.

Shortly after Operation Iraqi Freedom, Specialist first class Joey Petry, an hourly warehouse employee was activated and sent directly to Baghdad for 15 months. During this time, we also stayed particularly close to his mother and brother

during these very harrowing times. Since Joey was an hourly employee we did not pay any salary or benefits during his absence.

In October 2004 Our Company received the Secretary of Defense ESGR FREEDOM Award. It was then after the Government went out of its way to thank us with Waterford Crystal Eagles and Boss Lifts to military bases across the country did I begin to learn that not all employers do what I felt in my heart to be "the right thing".

I was in awe of the Soldiers at Ft. Benning, GA who thanked us BOSSES from the bottom of their hearts for supporting them in their efforts to protect us. At first blush it seemed that they were following orders as they thanked us for supporting the guard and reserve. It was not long into the 3 day visit that I realized that these thank you words were truly sincere and coming from the depths of their hearts. I was very moved by this!

I heard stories on that trip to Ft. Benning from soldiers, other bosses and reporters that...what a handful of us were doing for our activated employees was the exception and not rule.

Since 2004, soldiers have either been given my name or found us online and have called for advice on setting up procedures at their companies. What I have learned from these people is that indeed Colt Safety's treatment of its activated soldiers is NOT the norm in America's workplace.

With all of this said, I know that we at Colt Safety have always done the right thing. We have been a powerful and vocal advocate for supporting our guard and reserve.

Secretary Wolfowitz said to me on stage as he was handing me that beautiful Waterford Crystal Eagle, "we know it is easier to do what you have done when you are American Express". He knew that we were probably the smallest business ever to receive this award and that it may not have been easy for us financially.

In order to continue the good that we and other companies like us do by going above and beyond the call of duty, we must continue to be viable businesses. My request of our federal government is that they recognize all small businesses not only with crystal eagles and Conspicuous Service Medals, but also with Government contracts. Once the doors of commerce are open to small diversity companies, our Nation and its leaders will realize growth, quality services and prosperity beyond our wildest dreams.

After winning the Secretary of Defense Freedom Award, we were actually told by an undersecretary at the Pentagon that “We **owe** you and with what you have to sell, fits right in with what we buy”.

This Under Secretary then was kind enough to seek out yet another avenue for me to gain economic access. That call was with the Chairman of the Joint Chem- Bio Warfare program. This is the person who specifies protective gear that is worn by our soldiers. A few of those items are off the shelf items sitting in my warehouse on any given day. The Brigadier General told me I would have to go back to FedBiz Ops to look for opportunities. That is an area I had been soliciting since my first year in business 27 years ago, all with zero success.

That is the infamous Government maze of an outsider and a small business trying to get their foot in the door. Agencies continue to give billions of dollars of NO BID contracts to the same Big Businesses and are not even questioned or held accountable for not meeting diversity or small business goals. These agencies can lose billions of tax payer’s dollars and not account for any spending...with no questions asked.

Affording contracts to small businesses like mine who go above and beyond the call of duty in supporting our guard and reserve, will assure our viability in business so that we can continue to do the good that we do. It will assure us the wherewithal to continue to be CONTRIBUTORS in our society. Additionally the government will receive quality services at better prices and accountability when spending tax payer’s dollars.

It just makes sense that the largest procurement agency in the world, the US government would be happy and lucky to do business with those that have given extraordinarily to our citizen soldiers.

I have testified before a Senate Subcommittee Hearing and requested that they author a bill that will compensate by way of government contracts, those small businesses that support our guard and reserve specifically in the way that Colt Safety, Fire and Rescue has done. I am requesting this commission seriously consider the escalation of such a bill.

One very positive aspect for our citizen soldiers is that both Jim and Joey are currently taking advantage of the GI Bill and enrolled in college. This is a very good thing.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine J Bierman
CEO & Founder