

**TESTIMONY OF NINA ROSE HATFIELD, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND WILDLAND FIRE, U.S. DEPARTMENT  
OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SMALL BUSINESS COMMITTEE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE, EMPOWERMENT AND  
GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS  
COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS.**

**July 15, 2004**

Chairmen, and Members of both Committees, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department of the Interior (Interior) in support of strategies that will increase small business procurement opportunities with Service Disabled Veteran (SDV)-owned businesses.

Interior has a long and intimate connection with our Nation's veterans. Our organization grew from the Department of War in 1849. It has handled a range of veteran related issues from military pension offices for the Navy and War Department to the precious mission as the primary caretaker of 14 national cemeteries under the National Park Service, the final resting place of many of our Nation's soldiers.

Fifty percent of the \$4 billion spent by our bureaus and offices in fiscal year 2003 were awarded to small businesses. May of this year, Interior also received the Small Business Administration Award for Excellence in Procurement Goals, as well as, a Gold Star Award for procurement leadership in fiscal year 2003. We are proud of these recognitions but recognize the need for continued progress with the SDV owned businesses.

Our small business theme is "Know Your Neighbor" because we have offices located in most state with the responsibility where our veterans reside and are business owners. Interior's largest contracting areas are in information technology and construction. Interior purchases equipment and services in almost every business category. For many small businesses, understanding how to obtain a Federal contract remains a daunting task. For SDV owned businesses, Public Law 108-183 will open more doors. Through our nine buying organizations ranging from the US Geological Survey, Bureaus of Indian Affairs, Reclamation, Land Management, and the US Fish & Wildlife Service and National Park Service, we are committed to increasing contract opportunities for SDV.

Within Interior, positive much steps have occurred in the past two years but more remains to be accomplished for SDV owned businesses. Prior to the recent passage of the Veterans Benefits Act, Interior increased SDV procurements from FY 02 through 03 from \$7 million to \$18 million. Interior ranked in the upper third of all federal agencies in SDV contracting accomplishments for FY03 with .29% going to prime contract awards. We are confident that we can meet our share of the 3% government wide goal by fiscal year 2005 with the additional benefits of the set asides and sole-source authorities provided in Public Law 108-183.

The Interior Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization adopted a model to reach the 3% SDV goal by FY05 which is based upon partnerships, advocacy, and targeted information for our former men and women who have served us well. At every forum or chamber of commerce opportunity, Interior's small business leaders continue to address our commitment to increase SDV opportunities. With over 14 national small business associations, as our business partners, we will look at new ways they can work with us to involve SDV business owners as mentors and team player to produce positive results. As a pilot program, we are also looking for innovative ways to reach our SDV business owners through partnering with Minority Serving Institutions' business schools across the nation and our territories.

Today in Denver, Colorado, the Bureau of Land Management is hosting for the Federal regional offices a procurement fair for service disabled veterans with other key partners as the General Services Administration and the Small Business Administration. This event with our participation in other key outreach programs in Albuquerque, New Mexico and in Washington, DC is part of a larger Federal commitment to open opportunities.

I too personally believe that those who made the ultimate sacrifice in serving this country should give full benefit of small business contracting opportunities with the Federal Government across the board. This concludes my testimony, and I will be happy to answer any questions.