

Enhancing Cooperation Between Employers and Guardsmen/Reservists

Bill Number:

Hearing Date: October 19, 2005, 2:00 pm

Location: SD430

Witness:

Ms. Christine Bierman

Colt Safety-Fire & Rescue, St. Louis, MO

CEO

Testimony

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 a small, woman business enterprise celebrating our 25 year anniversary milestone this year.

Colt Safety warehouses and distributes Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and industrial SAFETY Supplies, everything a worker wears or uses in a hazardous environment according to OSHA and NFPA regulations.

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).

Our Company's Mission is to profitably meet the safety and hygiene needs of the American workforce.

Our VISION is to strategically and profitably nurture a successful company poised to give back to its family of employees and the community.

After the devastation to our Nation and our psyche as we watched the World Trade Towers vanish before our eyes on September 11, 2001, how could any American not step up to the plate to protect and defend this great Nation and to support any and all efforts to that end.

Colt Safety had 2 of our 17 employees activated after 9-11. That represents 20% of our entire work force.

Master Sgt Jim Mixco USAF Reservist, 9 year Colt Safety employee and Director of all

Technical Sales and Service at Colt was called to action to support Operation Noble Eagle shortly after those towers vanished. Jim would serve at Scott Air Force Base, IL which is 40 miles East of our offices in St. Louis, MO. His duty would be 24 hours on and 24 hours off.

My heart and my patriotic duty and the fact that Jim was a long time employee and responsible for a complete department at Colt Safety led me to choose to continue his full salary and benefits for the complete year that he was activated.

Then Jim's annual 3 week tour of duty had long been scheduled for March of 2003. Jim's unit was deployed to Saudi Arabia as the President presented ultimatums and deadlines to Saddam Hussein.

Needless to say tensions and emotions ran high while Jim was in the Middle East and terrorist threats and attacks began to escalate.

I was in continual contact with Jim's wife and frightened children. Jim emailed us periodically from Saudi. I replied that I was worried for his family and we should do something for his wife. He and I concocted a plan that I would purchase a gift certificate for a massage at a Day Spa for his wife and put it in a card and sign it from Jim. When I presented that gift to her on behalf of Jim...she cried.

Another employee SPC Joey Petry from the 203d BN Ft Leonard Wood, an hourly warehouse person was deployed directly to Bagdad after the President declared war on Saddam Hussein and during our company's busiest season. Joey's tour of duty was extended 2 times and lasted 16 months. Joey returned to his position at Colt until he chose to leave us and go back to college full time.

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.

Just 2 weeks ago a banker came to my office and noticed our Freedom Award. He told

me his horror story of his most recent activation. He said that by law his former bank had to give him a job upon his return. All of his previous clients were given to someone else and he would have to find new clients or be out of a job. He stayed at that bank for 45 days before he sought friendlier employment.

Over the past year, soldiers have either been given my name or found us online and have called for advice on setting up procedures at their companies. It is my hope that Colt Safety can serve as a role model to other companies in their endeavors to do the right thing for our guard and reserve.

With all of this said, I know that we at Colt Safety have always done the right thing. We have been 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.

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 9 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.

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 you today is that you recognize companies like mine, not only with crystal eagles and Conspicuous Service Medals, but also with Government contracting opportunities. 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.

I am certain you are aware of the following facts so I will quickly brief you on them. Small business is the engine that drives our nation's economy! Women business enterprises:

- ⊖ 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
In the state of Missouri, Women-owned firms employ 217,000 people
With annual sales approaching \$25 billion
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

Colt Safety is one small, woman business enterprise that can only continue to do the good documented in this testimony when we are afforded opportunities to do business with the largest procurement agency in the world, the United States Government.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully,
Christine J Bierman
CEO & Founder
Colt Safety, Fire & Rescue
8300 Manchester Rd. Saint Louis, MO 63144
www.coltsafety.com