

Dec 14 2010

Landrieu Addresses U.S. Chamber of Commerce Women in Business Forum

WASHINGTON – United States Senator Mary L. Landrieu, D-La., Chair of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship today addressed the U.S. Chamber “Women in Business Forum: Opportunities and Risks in an Uncertain Economy”. The forum brought together community leaders, women business owners, Chamber members and trade association representatives.

“I am very proud that more and more women are not just working in businesses, they are leading businesses,” Sen. Landrieu said in her remarks. “In fact, they are leading the movement of entrepreneurship in this country as the fastest growing group of business owners today. Because of the role women are now playing in entrepreneurship, it is appropriate that women are also leading the government’s efforts to aid small businesses, particularly women-owned small businesses.

“There is often a sense in Washington that the problems affecting women have been solved, that the discrepancy in the success of women-owned firms can be explained by women’s desire to balance work and family or a lack of desire in running a large corporation. This may be the case for some women – and men – but certainly not all. While women-owned businesses are growing at extraordinary rates, women business owners, like all business owners, are struggling in the face of limited access to capital and credit, lack of access to federal contracts and limited funding for technical assistance and counseling programs.”

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Snowe Voices Concern Over OSHA’s Noise Control Proposal

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship Ranking Member Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) and Senator Joseph I. Lieberman (ID-Conn.) sent a letter to Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis expressing concern about the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) proposed changes regarding workplace noise exposure. Senators Snowe and Lieberman, Co-Chairs of the Senate Task Force on Manufacturing,

noted that OSHA decided to publish the change as a “proposed interpretation,” rather than submitting the proposal for a notice and comment rulemaking, which allowed the agency to circumvent critical input small business stakeholders. “I have significant concerns about the process OSHA used to develop this proposed interpretation, which could have costly consequences for America’s small manufacturers,” said Senator Snowe. “Specifically, this change would add to the staggering regulatory burden facing small businesses, without offering any noticeable improvement to the hearing loss injury rate, which has already been on the decline in recent years. Additionally, it is unfortunate that OSHA did not utilize a notice and comment rulemaking to propose this shift in policy, which would have afforded the small business community an opportunity to thoroughly convey its concerns through a small business advocacy review panel.” Currently, businesses may provide employees with “personal protective equipment” – such as ear plugs and ear muffs that are fitted to the individual employees – if those items are more cost-effective than far broader “administrative or engineering controls,” to protect employees from elevated noise levels. A proposed new interpretation by OSHA would require employers to utilize more significant control measures – such as installing expensive new equipment or reducing the amount of time employees can work in an area with high noise – unless the company can demonstrate that these changes would force them out of business.

Dec 13 2010

Snowe, Kerry Urge SBA to Fully Implement Critical 2007 Energy Independence Legislation

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship Ranking Member Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) and former Chair John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) today sent a letter to Small Business Administration (SBA) Administrator Karen Mills requesting a response regarding the Agency’s progress in addressing 12 energy efficiency initiatives contained in P.L. 110-140, the *Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007*.

Signed into law in December 2007, the legislation contains a number of incentives to encourage small businesses to become more energy efficient, such as a venture capital program addressing the equity investment needs of small businesses, on-bill financing, the availability of energy efficiency audits, government-wide education programs, and additional technical assistance. In their letter, Senators Snowe and Kerry urged the SBA to discuss program implementation, as well as describe obstacles the agency has encountered to fully implementing these measures. “It is frankly outrageous

that the SBA has yet to fully implement the Energy Independence Act in the three years since it was signed into law,” said Senator Snowe. “According to the SBA’s Office of Advocacy, small entrepreneurs are charged approximately 35 percent more per unit for their electricity than the sector average. Combined with the disproportionate tax and regulatory burden shouldered by small business and the lingering economic recession, the SBA’s delay in implementing these vital provisions puts our nation’s entrepreneurs at further disadvantage. The SBA must utilize every resource to help foster an economic environment in which small businesses can simultaneously reduce energy cost and consumption while creating jobs and expanding operations.” “Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and they’re on the cutting edge of innovation in the energy sector,” said Senator Kerry. “There are countless more reasons we need to ensure that small businesses have the tools and incentives today to ensure their competitiveness tomorrow.”

Dec 13 2010

Snowe Applauds SBA Decision to Renew Patriot Express Loan Program

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine) today hailed the Small Business Administration’s (SBA) announcement that it will be renewing the Patriot Express loan program for three additional years. The Patriot Express initiative, which was originally set to expire at the end of 2010, provides enhanced guarantees and lower interest rates for SBA loans made to veterans, Reservists, and their spouses.

“Given the demonstrated success of the Patriot Express loan program since its inception, I commend the SBA for extending this initiative,” said Senator Snowe. “Our nation’s veterans and Reservists seeking to grow or expand their businesses deserve a streamlined, user-friendly process to apply for critical SBA loans, and the Patriot Express program has proven an extremely useful resource for nearly 7,000 of these brave men and women. Going forward, I urge the SBA to continue seeking ways to better improve its programs and initiatives targeted to veterans and their families.”

According to the SBA, since the Patriot Express program was launched in June 2007, the agency has provided over \$560 million in loan guarantees to roughly 7,000 veteran business owners.