

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 9, 2007

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
Herbert Clark Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

We are writing to urge the Department of Commerce to expand the scope of statistics gathered for veteran business owners in connection with the upcoming Survey of Business Owners (SBO), which is conducted by the Census Bureau every five years. As you know, this survey is an important tool for understanding the characteristics of American business owners, and the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship relies heavily on the SBO to make sound policy decisions. Likewise, the data collected through the survey would be very useful to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in fulfilling oversight responsibilities. Therefore, we are very disappointed in the limited information available about veteran and reservist small business owners.

While the 2002 SBO, which included limited veteran business owner information for the first time, was a step in the right direction, its effectiveness was limited by the general nature of the information obtained. For instance, unlike the 2002 SBOs on minority and women business owners, the 2002 survey did not include localized data for veteran business owners. This severely limited the effectiveness of the information for research purposes.

There are currently 25 million veterans in America, including over one million who have left military service since September 11, 2001. As the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, the number of veterans, including service disabled veterans, will increase, and the services that the government provides will continue to be critical in ensuring that veterans have the economic opportunities that they deserve. By learning more about the current state of veteran business ownership, economic policies can be more effectively tailored to address any deficits and more effectively assist those veterans who want to start or expand their businesses.

Please explain to us any obstacle in improving the data collection of veteran business owners and what the agency is doing to overcome these obstacles. In addition, please explain whether reservist business owner data or data about service-disabled veterans can be collected in the future.

This is an important issue, and we urge the Department of Commerce to address these matters as soon as possible. If there is any way that we or our staffs can be of assistance, please have your staff contact Karen Radermacher on the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship at (202) 224-8482 or Babette Polzer on the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs at (202) 224-6229. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.



John F. Kerry

Sincerely,



Daniel K. Akaka