

(Washington, DC) - As part of his ongoing commitment to our nation's veterans, Rep. Jason Altmire (PA-4), Chairman of the House Small Business Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, held a hearing today to assess the preparedness of the National Veterans Business Development Corporation (Veterans Corporation) and the Small Business Administration (SBA) in assisting recent veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in becoming successful entrepreneurs. Since taking office in January, Rep. Altmire has voted four times to increase federal funding for veterans, totaling more than \$11 billion. He has also introduced the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act (H.R. 1944) to increase the screening and treatment of traumatic brain injuries for our nation's veterans.

"Since 2001, there have been over 1.5 million troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, with roughly 300,000 service men and women returning each year from overseas. These numbers are only projected to grow," said Rep. Altmire. **"These brave men and women who have served our country so well should have the door opened to all the economic opportunities that we can provide them with when they return home. It is critical that they have access to the tools, support and initiatives they need in order to become successful business owners."**

The Veterans Corporation was established in 1999 to provide comprehensive training and business development assistance for potential entrepreneurs. This program was implemented to help supplement the existing initiatives at the SBA, such as Veterans Business Outreach Centers, which provide service members with information about the agency's programs and technical assistance. Returning veterans rely heavily on these types of initiatives in order to meet their unique needs and help them transition their skills and military leadership experience into business ownership.

"The catalyst for the creation of the Veterans Corporation was the need to provide assistance to our nation's veterans as they return to the states and work to start or expand businesses," said Rep. Altmire. **"Veterans are a powerful force in the economy, and it is vital that initiatives such as these are able to help this growing sector continue their development."**

Veterans represent an important component of the U.S. small business sector. Veterans account for 14 percent of small business enterprises, including 7 percent that are operated by service-disabled veterans. Numbering more than 5 million, these veteran entrepreneurs make critical contributions to the U.S. economy.

Leading veterans' organizations told the subcommittee that more must be done to promote the economic stability of veterans through entrepreneurship and raised concerns about the effectiveness of current programs, including concerns that the unique needs of our returning veterans, such as programs targeting reservists and service-disabled and female veterans, are not being adequately met.

Cranberry Township veteran and entrepreneur James A. Clair attended the hearing. **"As a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and current member of the National Guard, I know how difficult it can be to start a business from the ground up, the real challenges facing veteran entrepreneurs and the obstacles that members of the Guard and Reserve face as small business owners,"**

said Clair.

"While I have yet to be deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, I realize that deployment is a very real possibility and something I must prepare for as a business owner. After all, my family and business count on it."

Clair, who owns the Ultimate Defensive Driving School in Cranberry Township, served in the Marine Corps from 1983-87 and joined the Army National Guard in 2006 at the age of 40. Clair urged the subcommittee to consider more programs designed to assist Guard and Reservists in preparing their businesses for long-term deployments. **"The Pennsylvania National Guard is the sixth largest employer in the Commonwealth with 19,000 members,"**

said Clair.

"Absences away from a business are inevitable, whether due to training on the weekend or long-term deployments. Because many entrepreneurs are unprepared to leave their businesses, they are often forced to close down without a plan or the funds in place to re-launch the business when they return."