

**UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

“Disaster Recovery: Evaluating the Role of America’s Small Business in
Rebuilding Their Communities”

TESTIMONY OF SID F. DAVIS

OWNER – BIG JOHN’S HEAVY EQUIPMENT

Thursday, September 15th, 2011

Thank you, Chairwoman Landrieu, Ranking Member Snowe, and members of the committee, for inviting me to testify today on issues pertaining to evaluating the role of small businesses, as we rebuild our community after the EF-5 tornado disaster in Joplin, Missouri.

Responding to emergencies is not new to us. On May 4th, 2003, many stepped forward with men and equipment, and along with other contractors like myself, helped clean up debris from another EF-3 tornado that touched down in a small town just north of Joplin.

On May 22nd of this year, we were out again, just hours after the Joplin tornado, assisting to clear debris, rescue survivors, retrieve bodies of victims, and to open streets and roadways, volunteering for many days. We worked until the National Guard and outside law enforcement organizations relieved us, and took over.

Within the week when the work was assigned for Expedited Debris Removal, I was one of five local contractors selected. The Army Corps of Engineers divided the Destruction Zone into six sectors, and I was entrusted with the hardest hit area.

Over the two months we worked in the tornado zone, we removed the most tonnage of debris, in the shortest amount of time, using the highest number of local and minority subcontractors, of any team. Because of the progress we made, our area was the first to receive permits, so that homes and businesses could start to rebuild.

The best aspects of small businesses in times of crisis are that we can bring our past experience to any situation to meet the greatest need very quickly. Specifically, I was able to use my experience as a Marine officer to organize, direct, and control the dangerous environment of the storm damage area without having any additional casualties. My experience of working with foreign governments while I was with 3rd Marine Division allowed me to easily work with FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers to meet their ever-changing requirements, while accomplishing the mission.

Since 1986, I have run the family business, Big John's Heavy Equipment, based on the same principles that Big John and the Corps instilled in me: character, integrity, and responsibility. He never shrank back when called on, and I have taken his business forward. Hopefully my son will be the third generation, and be a man of character, integrity and responsibility.

Because small business has to be profitable every day to survive, is why they are best to respond to any emergency. The entrepreneurial spirit cannot be duplicated by anyone who does not have skin in the game. Just as I took my time in the service seriously, I take my responsibilities as a small business owner just as seriously. And I think that the values that small business owners bring to the table create an atmosphere for successful rebuilding after emergencies and devastation. These principles are what will allow Joplin to recover quickly, and can work in any community, in any disaster.

What the Federal government provides small business is an opportunity to use their existing talents for our communities to recover quickly. Over fifty percent of the school buildings were destroyed. But our schools opened on time, because small business, in the face of disaster, was able to bring its best forward. We lost fifty percent of our medical facilities, and they have all reopened in some capacity, because of character and integrity and responsibility for our community.

In conclusion, your first response to any situation is based on what is inside you and a community. Out of our tornado disaster was brought forward what Joplin is truly made of: A collection of people and small businesses that can not only recover, but together build a better community, a better state, and a better country.

Thank you for your time today. I will be happy to answer any questions the Committee might have.