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United States Senate

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October 19, 2009

The Honorable Karen G. Mills
Administrator
U.S. Small Business Administration
409 3rd Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20416

Dear Administrator Mills:

In my April 7, 2009 letter to you, shortly after your confirmation, I listed my priorities on which I urged you to focus. High on that list was having a meaningful and effective contracting program established that would satisfy Congressional intent and the needs of women-owned small businesses. In your April 16, 2009 response, you reiterated the passion that we share to help women entrepreneurs succeed and the need to implement an effective women's contracting program. In that vein, I commend your October 14, 2009 announcement of the Small Business Administration's (SBA) new online training course "Winning Federal Contracts – A Guide for Women Entrepreneurs," a noteworthy and promising educational program.

I am greatly encouraged by the latest statistics related to Federal contracting dollars awarded to small businesses from the funds appropriated under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA). Reports show that, as of October 13, 2009, small businesses were receiving over 26 percent of the ARRA Federal contracting dollars, well-exceeding the 23 percent statutory goal. Service-disabled veteran-owned, HUBZone, and small disadvantaged businesses have also been receiving dollars above the statutory goals. I commend you and the Administration for helping to ensure that small businesses are receiving these critical contracting opportunities.

Unfortunately, women-owned small businesses have not fared as well as those in the other small businesses contracting programs. In fact, women continue to be overlooked, including through ARRA contracts, with the Federal government falling far short of the five percent women's contracting goal.

As you know, the Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned, HUBZone, and Small Disadvantaged business programs all have tools in place to help contracting officers award contracts to businesses within the respective programs. On December 21, 2000, a women's contracting program law (P.L. 106-554) was enacted to give women similar

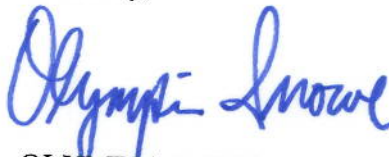
tools. Regrettably – after three Congressional reports, numerous hearings, two proposed rules, one highly deficient final rule, and almost a decade passing – women are still inhibited by the SBA’s failure to pass meaningful and effective regulations.

I repeatedly expressed my frustration to the previous Administration for dragging its feet in developing women contracting regulations. I was further outraged when the proposed implementing regulations that were eventually produced – eight years after enactment of the law – did not provide the tools envisioned by Congress and basically thwarted the law’s intent.

Now, with over nine months having passed in this new Administration, I am deeply concerned that the regulations have yet to be established. It is crucial that we end this injustice as soon as possible and what better time to announce an impending change than in October 2009, National Women’s Small Business Month. Women have waited entirely too long, and I am asking that, by October 31, 2009, you please provide a timetable for the implementation of these vital regulations.

As always, I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
Ranking Member