



WIPP WORKS IN WASHINGTON

Is 1/100th of a Percent Good Enough? By Ann Sullivan, WIPP Government Relations

It is highly unlikely that 1/100th of a percent is considered a successful statistic when applied to almost anything. Yet, that is exactly the percentage of contracts awarded through the Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Procurement Program. Of the more than \$1.6 trillion in federal contracts awarded since the program's inception, only \$212 million were awarded through the program that the women's business community fought 11 years to implement.

Since the program has been in place for three years through the Small Business Administration (SBA), it has done poorly among its peers: Of the \$50 billion designated for small businesses, contracts awarded through the WOSB program account for only .19% -- less than a quarter of a percent of all small business contracts.

Rather than wallow in the inadequacy of 1/100th of a percent, we put on our advocacy helmet to try to change it. A proven method of increasing contracting to small businesses, is giving contracting officers the ability to sole source contracts to firms that can do the work. More than 15% of all contracts designated for small businesses were awarded through sole source contracts. The inability of the WOSB procurement program to utilize this contracting tool represents a substantial loss to women-owned companies. 15% equals \$7.8 billion that went to someone other than a woman owned company.

Change came in the form of a House amendment sponsored by Representative Jackie Speier. A member of the Armed Services Committee, she shepherded the amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act—a must pass piece of legislation. The amendment gives the WOSB procurement program sole source authority. It also accelerates the disparity study on which the WOSB program is based. Why wait until 2018 to renew the list of industries underrepresented by women in federal contracting? The amendment asks for a 2-year turnaround. By

the way, every small business federal contracting program has sole source authority except for the women so we are asking that we be treated equally, that's all.

Now it is up to the Senate to act. We need Senate leaders like Jeanne Shaheen who is on the Senate Armed Services Committee and Maria Cantwell who Chairs the Senate Small Business Committee to take up our cause. In the next several months, the Senate version of the NDAA will be debated on the Senate floor. We are asking the Senate to do the same thing the House did—pass a sole source amendment to improve the WOSB procurement program.

1/100th of a percent? We can do better – much, much better.