



**STATEMENT OF ELISE MITCHELL, President and CEO of
Mitchell Communications Group, Fayetteville, AR**

On Behalf of Women Impacting Public Policy

Before the U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Small Business

Women Impacting Public Policy

**Tales of Resilience: Small Business Survival in the
Recession**

July 25, 2012

My name is Elise Mitchell and I am the President and CEO of Mitchell Communications Group. I bring you greetings from my company and from our home base of Northwest Arkansas, a thriving region with deep entrepreneurial roots in one of the most beautiful parts of the country- as Chairman Graves well knows.

I am also here today on behalf of Women Impacting Public Policy (WIPP), a national nonpartisan organization advocating on behalf of nearly 1 million women-owned businesses and representing 64 business organizations. I'm proud to represent all of these leaders.

Established in 1995 as a sole proprietorship, our company today is a Top 50 strategic communications firm working with some of the world's largest companies and best known brands including: Walmart, Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Tyson Foods, Procter & Gamble, Sam's Club, Southwestern Energy Company, and J.B. Hunt Transport.

We are fortunate to do national and global work for these distinctive clients. We have successfully attracted top talent and developed new and innovative communications services. As a result, we've grown 445% in the past four years alone. We are also very honored to have won numerous industry awards, and twice been named to the Inc. 500/5000 list, as well as one of the "50 Fastest Growing Women-Owned/Led Companies in North America" by Women Presidents' Organization and American Express OPEN.

I wish I could say that many women business owners shared my experience, but many small-business owners have faced significant challenges in this recession. Not only do we face many hurdles but our customers are also drowning in this economy, making business harder to find. I am often asked how we have achieved growth in spite of a still uncertain economy.

The answer is not what you might expect. I'm an avid motorcycle rider, and I've built my business based on a concept called "Looking Through the Turn," a fundamental principle of motorcycling that offers great insight. As you approach a turn, you must look where you want to go rather than fixating on potential hazards in the turn itself. The challenge comes in keeping your eyes focused on where you want to end up while using your instincts and experience to adjust within the turn — all at a moment's notice.

Inspired by this philosophy, I've used these core principles to help our agency succeed, and there are several important lessons I have learned along the way.

First, don't be afraid to admit you don't know, but be willing to do whatever it takes to find out. Throughout the past four years, we've all faced challenges we

could never have imagined. I've learned to recognize when I need a new solution, and am willing to do whatever it takes to figure it out. That means surrounding myself with the smartest people I know and remaining a life-long learner so I can constantly improve my game.

Second, leaders who look through the turn stand for something. During some of the darkest days of the recession, we came together as a company to write a common set of values: trust, open communication, service, results and commitment. These values guided us when we needed them most, and have helped us attract some of the best employees and clients anyone could hope for.

Third, leaders who look through the turn know how to take risks. I suppose risk is something I am more comfortable with than most, but the trick is to balance risk and discipline to yield solid results. In spite of the ambiguity of the marketplace, I've encouraged our team to look for emerging opportunity. As a result, we've developed several new services, enhanced our value proposition, and helped our business grow.

Finally, leaders who look through the turn don't try to go it alone. It is the greatest privilege of my career to be the steward of Mitchell Communications Group, and I've learned that "excellence attracts excellence." Great people attract great clients -- you can't have one without the other. There are also a number of organizations such as WIPP, the Women Presidents' Organization and Amex OPEN that provide guidance via a network of support and advocacy for women entrepreneurs- nobody has to go it alone.

It takes courage to be an entrepreneur, and there is much Washington can do to make the roadway smoother rather than more hazardous. It has been made clear that Washington recognizes the vital role of small firms in the economy and the plight of America's job creators. But what we need to see from our lawmakers is an effort to fully consider small businesses during rule-making, facilitate access to capital and provide certainty about taxes- this will allow us to do what we do best- fuel the national economy and hire more of our neighbors.

Women owned businesses represent one of the fastest growing contributors to our national economy, with an impact of \$1.2 trillion annually. Yet we are also faced with a number of unique obstacles. It is because of those obstacles placed before us, and only us, that I ask you to support those resources we have to not only level the playing field but help us continue to grow and prosper while growing the economy with us. Programs like Women Business Centers and the Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) contracting program are a step in the right direction and will yield immense results.

I started my business as an S-corp, which is a business that files the company taxes under the owner's personal tax return. It seems that the dialogue in D.C. about taxing "the rich" has completely ignored the tax structure of most of America's small companies. While they may file with more than \$250,000 when tax season comes, almost every penny of that is reinvested in the firm- whether it be to make payroll, purchase new equipment or simply keep the lights on. Now is not the time to increase taxes on those creating the jobs that Americans so desperately need. More importantly now is not the time to hold small businesses hostage in a state of tax uncertainty, we must be able to plan ahead if we are to move forward.

We must also facilitate greater access to capital and support the resources we need to not just survive, but thrive. Even with the track record of funding America's cash starved entrepreneurs, credit unions are being held back by an outdated and nonsensical rule. There is currently a cap on loans to small firms that, if increased, would inject an extra \$13 billion into the economy, giving small businesses the fuel they need to create 140,000 new jobs in the first year alone. The Small Business Lending Enhancement Act (H.R. 1418/ S. 2231) would do just that by increasing the credit union lending cap to 25.7 percent.

Support women entrepreneurs and the economy will prosper.

There are countless women-owned businesses, 7.8 million be exact, working tirelessly to drive our economy forward. And when I think about them, their dreams and determination inspire me, as I know they do you.

I ask all of you here today as well as your colleagues in Congress to help lay the tracks for America's job engine to move forward, and to help ease many of the crushing pressures the economy places on us. Improve the economy and the nation's job engine will have more fuel to propel us to a recovery, as small businesses have done in every recession in modern history.

Now more than ever before, our country needs businesses and lawmakers who are willing to look through the turn, to fix their eyes on where we want this great country to end up, and work together to get there.