



Testimony for US Congressional Hearing

The Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Investigations, Oversight, and Regulations

“Vets First? An Examination of VA’s Resources for Veteran-Owned Small Businesses”

Robert Taylor, Alliant Enterprises, LLC a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB)

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Chairman Kelly, Ranking Member Adams, Members of the Committee on Small Business Subcommittee on Investigations, Oversight, and Regulations; thank you for the opportunity for me to be here today. It is my honor to provide this committee with my testimony on the important value our company provides to the VA.

My name is Bob Taylor and I am testifying on behalf of my company and the 39 employees of Alliant Healthcare Products, a Grand Rapids, Michigan based Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB). I am also here as one representative of the National Veteran’s Small Business Coalition.

Background

In my 17-year military career leading to the rank of Major, I served my first 6 years active duty Air Force as a navigator and radar navigator on B-52 Bombers.

In my much younger years, as a First Lieutenant, I flew eleven combat missions in the First Gulf War from the Island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. I clearly remember one day when we learned that one of our B-52s had crashed and three crew members were lost. I can still see the faces of those young men and I carry their memories with me. I would never do anything with my business to disrespect their sacrifices or those of other veterans who have made such great sacrifices.

The fact that this hearing is a little over one week following Memorial Day, reminds us all that there are veterans who have sacrificed far more than me or anyone else here today.

So, to me, it’s not only a business matter, but a sense of responsibility and a with sense of purpose, that I have always tried to make sure that my business sets high standards in all of our business dealings. I refuse to operate as a simple “pass-through” or what’s referred to as a “rent-a-vet”. I constantly remind people we’re not just selling widgets to consumers, but we’re providing what are often life-saving healthcare products to care for our war fighters and veterans who have served their country.

How do we add value?

Alliant Healthcare Products focuses on helping other companies navigate the complexities of the federal market. We assist large and small businesses who provide market-leading and innovative healthcare technologies. We have developed a strong reputation as an exceptional federal market expert who provides value throughout the supply chain of the VA.

Our most important benefit to the government is we do not mark-up prices for the clear majority of the products we sell to the VA. We allow the VA to negotiate fair and reasonable pricing as though they are buying directly from the manufacturer themselves and then we honor those prices. Manufacturers pay us based on the services we provide them, and the government does not pay for our services.

In the words of one contracting officer:

“We love working with Alliant because you offer the same exact pricing and your team understands the government procurement process better than the manufacturers”

Selling to a VA hospital is quite different than selling commercially and manufacturers’ representatives are ill-prepared to deal with the complexity of acquisition regulations. As a service, we have our own Area Vice Presidents who cover the United States. They provide support to make sure acquisition rules are followed and help contracting officers get what they need in a timely manner.

From another contracting officer, again, I quote:

“Alliant is able to attend in-person meetings with clinical representatives. Having someone in meetings that understands how to speak government language is incredibly beneficial.”

We are also very creative problem solvers. For example, A VA wanted to receive high-value endoscopes kitted together because if they receive them separately the individual pieces seldomly find each other within the hospital causing unnecessary re-ordering of high-priced components. In this case, the large manufacturer was unable to provide these kits due to their internal policies. Our certified quality systems allowed us to purchase the same components and place them together at our manufacturing site in a single package and deliver exactly what the VA wanted.

Conclusion:

Alliant does provide value to the VA, their contracting officers, and the patients who are treated by the best technology available. My question to this committee and to the VA is this: What is the possible downside to working with SDVOSBs if the hospitals receive what they need in a faster manner, with a more efficient process, with cost effective-creative solutions, more accurate transactions, and all delivered with better outcomes? -- And that is exactly our mission.

End of oral testimony

The added benefits of working with Veteran-Owned Businesses

There are many examples I can provide based on Alliant's internal expert resources such as people who: review solicitations, provide telephone support for questions and information, and contract specialist who make sure the right products are on the right contracting tool.

Moreover, there are also more hidden benefits of a Vet's First program. For example, veterans like me, re-invest and develop new and creative ways to serve the Government. In one case, I have re-invested our money into acquiring a cardiovascular surgical business and in research and development of state-of-the-art medical products. A sister company to Alliant Healthcare Products, Surge Cardiovascular, has developed unique products one of which, as we've been told by surgeons, is the only product on the market which can handle the blood flow of larger patients for minimally invasive valve replacement surgeries. I've also re-invested into a medical device contract manufacturer, Medisurge, LLC. I'm hiring more people and providing innovative products like one which mixes silver with micro-sized glass beads to provide a healing matrix for severe wounds. And, there are more products and services in our pipeline.

Another hidden benefit is that we provide focus of our large manufacturer's representatives towards the VA. Given a choice between calling on a large commercial account like Beaumont Hospital System near Detroit, MI or the Detroit VA Medical Center, most representatives will choose the commercial account over the VA, because the VA is harder to navigate, contracting officers can be intimidating, and there are many unknowns to how the VA works. Alliant gives the representatives a reason to go into the VA Medical Centers, we help them overcome their hesitance, and we facilitate the procurement process. Consequently, we assure that the best technologies are now getting represented in the VA and the veterans always benefit from access to better technology. In the words of one of our manufacturing clients:

"Alliant Healthcare provides our team the confidence needed to provide veterans access to innovative new products for better healthcare. Without Alliant, our team would likely not pursue VA hospitals due to the complex procurement process that our team is unfamiliar with."

Veterans also take care of other veterans. That's why in 2015 I founded the Patriot Promise Foundation aimed at helping the 47% of veterans who struggle with reintegration following their service. In 2019, we plan to take the next step with the foundation and create a "Venture Philanthropy" model where 100% veterans work together building a business, supporting each other, and creating new missions and purpose for each veteran associated with the foundation.

In addition, I will be introducing a book later this year titled "From Service to Success." This book presents the information and the tools necessary to better cope with life after service. It will also help veterans create their own mission for a brighter future.

Additional Testimonials not included in oral testimony

From our manufacturing clients:

“Alliant Healthcare helps and ensures that we comply with all government regulations, procurement guidelines, TAA / BAA issues, etc. Without Alliant, we would not know what to look for regarding solicitation language and expectations of Contracting Officers. Alliant fills a clear gap in our knowledge and resource level that is required to successfully sell to the Federal Government.”

“Alliant Healthcare can speak the language. Alliant can communicate to Contracting Officers, Logistics officers, and Procurement Specialist in a way that our manufacturing representatives cannot. Their ability to communicate effectively to government personnel usually results in the VA receiving quicker access to the products and solutions they need.”

“Alliant Healthcare informs us of regulation changes and new contracting options that are applicable to our products. Without Alliant, our products would not be available to veteran’s via ECAT, DAPA, or MSPV. We do not have an internal team monitoring these new contracts and opportunities.”

“Alliant Healthcare has the ability to help our company with TAA/BAA¹ compliance issues.”

“Alliant Healthcare is one of very few SDVOSB’s that employ field-based representatives that physically visit VA facilities across the country. Their knowledge of the facility and purchasing preferences significantly help our clinical representatives find solutions to fit the needs and requirements of the VA doctors.”

From other government customers:

“Alliant is so easy to work with, you make my job easy, one phone call my work is complete”

“I am very impressed with your value proposition to the government (same pricing model) – this is extremely refreshing to hear”

“Alliant understands my contracting requirements and can help find creative solutions. This cannot be said in regards to most large manufacturers.”

“We love how knowledgeable Alliant Healthcare is with the government purchasing models – you make our jobs easy”

“I appreciate your ability to help my purchasing needs get fulfilled quickly. By having an SDVOSB that understands the government landscape and has regional representatives / support, I’m able to order products quicker and easier than going directly through a large manufacturer”

¹ TAA/BAA – TAA is an abbreviation for Trade Agreement Act, BAA is an abbreviation for Buy American Act. This is quite difficult for some companies to comply with due to the complexity of their supply chains and the particular sourcing of individual components. Alliant assists in making sure the companies comply with these important Acts.

Other Resources:

Hi Rick, (Rick is one of Alliant's Area Vice Presidents)

It's my pleasure...you and Jamie have been wonderful to work with since I awarded to Alliant the first time.....and I'm always pleased to see a quote/proposal from Alliant even if we're not able to award to you. Hic-ups happen, and I/we understand that....happens with us, too. And Alliant Healthcare is always very responsive and quick in sorting out anything that comes up.

I appreciate your note and look forward to working with you and your team on future projects.

Pete

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*****End of written testimony*****