



Small business: The heart of job creation

By U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman

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Some of the constituents of the 6th Congressional District associate my background mostly with the military prior to my election to Congress, so they might wonder what I'm doing as a subcommittee chairman for the Small Business Committee in the United States House of Representatives and why I'm so passionate about small business.

In 1982, I was serving as an infantry officer with the U.S. Marine Corps overseas. I loved the Marines but missed Colorado and decided when my active duty commitment was up that I would return home where I could start a new career in the private sector while continuing to serve my country in the Marine Corps Reserves.

I didn't have a business or technical degree and my only work history consisted of mechanized infantry in the Army and service as an infantry officer in the Marine Corps. Normally, veterans with leadership experience are recruited by corporations for supervisory and middle management positions, but in an economy barely recovering from a deep recession, my military skills were not exactly sought after by local businesses.

Out of desperation, I began to look for professions that were commission-based where the applicant bore the risk. By taking this approach, getting my proverbial "foot in the door" without having much in the way of experience was a lot easier. If I was going to do something like that I needed to do it soon since, without a steady income, I was eating into the savings I accrued from my active duty in the Marine Corps. I decided on real estate and one of the elective classes I took to get my real estate broker's license was in property management. After taking the class I decided that property management appealed to me more than real estate sales.

The firms I put applications in for all wanted prior experience in the property management field. Given the competitive nature of a tight labor market, they could be selective to the point of hiring only applicants with experience so they didn't have to dedicate any of their resources for

training new hires. In studying up on the firms that I was applying for, I begin to understand their business models and how they worked operationally.

I had two choices at that point. The first was to lower my sights and take jobs that I really didn't want that would not have used my education or my leadership training but would have paid enough to get by or risk what savings I had left on creating my own job. I chose the latter and at age 28 I formed my own business out of my rented one-bedroom condominium in Aurora. It was difficult to get my first account but once I did each one after that came a little easier as my portfolio of properties began to expand. After six months, I moved the business into a commercial space but to afford the increase in cost I had to temporarily move in with my parents.

The first five years were incredibly tough. I often worked a seven day week and sometimes late into the night, but it was exciting to be in business for myself. It was my business and I had to be creative and challenge myself everyday to stay competitive. I never got up in the morning and dreaded going to work. I never felt compelled to watch the clock and daydream about getting off work to have the freedom to do what I really wanted to do because what I really wanted to do was to be successful and in doing so my small business created jobs.

According to the National Federation of Independent Business, small businesses created more than 60 percent of all net new jobs in the United States during the last 15 years and provide 55 percent of all jobs in the private sector. No doubt, raising the cost for small businesses by increasing the tax and regulatory burdens will never create jobs in America but lowering those burdens definitely will. The experiences I had as a small business owner not only taught me how to balance a budget, to meet a payroll, and to run an organization efficiently and competitively enough to make a profit, but they also taught me that small business is the engine that drives economic growth and that small businesses will continue to be at the center of job creation in America.

I'll always be passionate about small business.

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