

FY 25 Legislative Branch Member Day Remarks

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member for having Members here to testify about our priorities. I am here to talk about something you don't see very often in this Congress, especially in this Committee – a bipartisan proposal. The letter that my office has provided the committee a copy of is led not just by myself, but also by Representatives Molinaro, Mike Thompson, and Strong. We are requesting the Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill support the employment of Americans with disabilities by purchasing at least 25% of the flags the CAO procures in order to satisfy constituent flag requests from the AbilityOne Program.

As a bit of background for those who don't know, when Congress passed the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (JWOD), it required the federal government, **and that includes legislative entities**, to procure products and services whenever possible from the AbilityOne program. Now why would they institute this requirement? Because by procuring through the AbilityOne program, you certify that the product or service you are purchasing is provided by Americans with disabilities, including those living with blindness, and a growing number of returning disabled veterans. Thanks to these federal dollars supporting employment for those with disabilities, tens of thousands of Americans are able to work at good-paying jobs. Through the AbilityOne program, we allow Americans with disabilities to achieve a level of financial independence that too often is out of reach.

Unfortunately, the number of Americans employed through AbilityOne has declined in recent years. While this has spurred a renewed commitment to the Program in the Executive Branch, Congress has not only failed to increase our efforts to engage with AbilityOne, but in many cases, is in fact failing to make the basic required procurements under JWOD. Each year, the Chief Administrative Officer purchases and flies over the Capitol over 100,000 flags to be presented to our constituents. Currently, not a single flag is purchased through the AbilityOne program.

This is despite the law being crystal clear that products on the Procurement List should always be purchased unless they are demonstrably not fit for purpose. Right now, the AbilityOne Commission lists three Vendors that together produce nearly a quarter of a million flags annually for other federal entities. These flags are of such high quality that they are used to lay our fallen veterans to rest.

If these flags are good enough for our Veterans, they are certainly good enough to be presented to our constituents.



So, if these flags are fit for purpose, why isn't CAO purchasing them now? Because despite being required to engage with AbilityOne under JWOD, legislative branch entities are not subject to any enforcement or reporting mechanisms. So, for now, we must ensure compliance one step at a time. If this procurement order goes as well as Representatives Molinaro, Mike Thompson, Strong, and I expect, we should continue to raise the percentage in future years.

And if you are interested in increasing Legislative Branch procurement from the AbilityOne program more holistically, reach out to Congressman Molinaro and I. We are working with the Committee on House Administration on a larger fix that I would be happy to talk to you about.

But for now, let's do the obvious thing. The thing that is required by law. Let's ensure when our constituents purchase a flag to fly over the Capitol, it is one made by a Veteran who returned home after developing a disability in service to our country. Let's do the bipartisan thing. Let's procure at least 25% of CAO flags from the AbilityOne Program in FY 25. With that, I thank the Committee for its time, and yield back.