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## **Rep. Dennis Kucinich Opening Statement for Hearing on the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs**

*WASHINGTON, D.C. – Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Denis Kucinich (D-OH) for the Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce’s hearing entitled, “Reviewing the Impact of the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs’ regulatory and Enforcement Actions.”*

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you for calling this hearing to examine the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP).

The federal government spends \$537 billion a year on contractors. With that kind of money at stake, taxpayers have every right to expect that those contractors will perform to the highest standards.

One of those standards is a simple one. Obey the law. Respect the civil rights of American workers.

That’s where OFCCP comes in. The agency’s mission is to ensure that contractors receiving federal taxpayer dollars comply with employment nondiscrimination and equal opportunity requirements. Taxpayer dollars should never be used to violate civil rights or to perpetuate discrimination.

OFCCP monitors contractors for systemic civil rights violations, including everything from equal pay for women, to failures to hire or promote veterans or individuals with disabilities.

Today that work is more important than ever.

Each year, more than 2 million Americans are affected by workplace discrimination. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reports that private sector bias charges are at an all-time high. These unlawful employment practices cost our country \$64 billion annually. Nearly 50 years after the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, it is unacceptable that workplace discrimination continues to be so prevalent.

Yesterday we marked a milestone that illustrates how much work we – and OFCCP – have to do. Yesterday, April 17, was Equal Pay Day. Equal Pay Day marked the day on which women's compensation finally caught up with their male counterparts from last year. To earn what men earned in 2011, women must work all of 2011, and then keep on working, right up until April 17 of this year.

That's because, as the U.S. Census Bureau has pointed out, women working full-time continue to earn just 77 cents for every dollar a man earns.

This pay gap costs women \$10,784 in lost wages each year. Lower lifetime earnings mean women have smaller pensions and an average annual Social Security benefit that is 25 percent less than their male counterparts.

And it's not just women who suffer from pay discrimination. Paying people less than what they are owed is a drag on the entire economy.

Closing the wage gap will help families stay in their homes, decrease reliance on government programs, and allow working women the opportunity to spend more of their hard-earned money in their communities.

OFCCP is the only agency that systemically reviews federal contractors' employment practices for pay discrimination. The agency makes sure that, when taxpayer dollars are spent, women receive equal pay for equal work.

OFCCP's mission extends well beyond women's pay. The agency is also hard at work protecting our returning veterans, individuals with disabilities, as well as racial and ethnic minorities – all of whom have been hit particularly hard by the Great Recession.

Fortunately, this agency has not been content to maintain the status quo.

In a recently proposed regulation, OFCCP recognized that our nation's veterans face unique challenges in transitioning to civilian employment. It is working to improve monitoring and enforcement in this area.

Our veterans have every right to expect that they will receive fair consideration for employment on projects supported by federal tax dollars. OFCCP's job is to make sure these men and women get a fair shake when they join the civilian workforce.

The agency has also proposed a regulation updating the obligations of federal contractors with respect to individuals with disabilities.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, individuals with disabilities face nearly double the unemployment rate of individuals without disabilities.

That is astounding, especially at a time when technological advances make it possible for individuals with disabilities to succeed in many more jobs than would otherwise be the case.

The fight against discrimination is smart economics. Taxpayer dollars are limited. Taxpayers should expect that their dollars are spent wisely; employing, promoting and compensating workers based on their merit, not on their gender, race, disability or veteran status. That is both morally right and good for business. Nondiscrimination ensures higher quality work.

OFCCP has a gargantuan job monitoring the hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars spent on contractors every year. While the agency develops ways to make its enforcement efforts more thorough, more agile, and more effective, let's not lose sight of the edict it is attempting to enforce.

It's a simple edict. It's one grounded in common sense. If you want to do business with the government of the United States, you will treat our citizens fairly.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel of witnesses and yield back. Thank you.

<http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov>