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Small Firms Encouraged To Pursue Federal Work

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By [Anthony Cronin](#)

Published on 6/17/2008 in [Home](#) » [Business](#) » [Business Local](#)

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney said Monday the federal government can serve as a valuable source of future contracting work for the region's growing small-business community.

Courtney, who held a daylong seminar in Norwich on dealing with the federal contracting process, said small business can play a vital role in serving the myriad federal agencies that require services ranging from defense work to automotive repair.

"The potential is strong," said Courtney of the billions of dollars of federal contracting needs each year. "But for a lot of businesses, the biggest hurdle is getting across the threshold of the (federal) contracting process," said the Second District Democrat.

Courtney hosted the government contracting forum at the Slater Auditorium at Norwich Free Academy, which brought out about 50 area businessmen and women representing more than 80 small businesses across eastern Connecticut.

By working with the various agencies of the federal government, Courtney said that small businesses can realize greater profits, and greater business opportunities. But he said they first need to understand the sometimes confusing array of procurement processes used by the agencies.

The forum included representatives from the federal General Services Administration, the Defense Contract Management Agency as well as the Connecticut Procurement Technical Assistance Program and the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology.

Representatives from those agencies provided overviews of the government contracting process as well as an explanation of the growing use of electronic invoicing.

Since taking office, Courtney has hosted numerous forums to better help small business and municipal agencies deal with the sometimes Byzantine world of the federal government, including how to market and sell goods and services to its many agencies and departments.

Courtney also announced he is serving on a new "Smart Contracting Caucus" with three other congressmen, including Republican Christopher Shays from Fairfield County. The aim of the new caucus is to attempt to make the federal procurement process more accessible and competitive. Besides Courtney and Shays, the other members of the new group are Congressman Tom Davis, a Virginia Republican who heads the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, and Congressman Christopher Carney, a Democrat from Pennsylvania.

"The (federal) contracting process is uneven throughout the government," said Courtney. "It's not the most glamorous issue in the world, but I think it's really something that needs to get some attention placed on it."

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