



The Millennial Entrepreneurial Spirit: Move Fast, Break Things

Statement of Evan Baehr
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before the House Budget Committee
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Able. More than a Loan.
ablelending.com

Testimony

Testimony submitted from Evan Baehr, Able Cofounder, to the House Budget Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives for the hearing on “Restoring the Trust for Young Americans.” Wednesday, September 9, 2015.

For years I wanted to be you. I ran for City Council (but lost). I worked at DC think tanks and as a legislative aide in Congress. I believed that public policy was the best avenue for social change. I no longer believe that. Thank you to Chairman Price for inviting me here to share why.

I met a man named Peter Thiel, who taught me it is precisely the people who want to “change the world” that should start companies instead of work for government or nonprofits. Peter brought this spirit to bear on many major public problems — and for each he created a company.

- Wrangle in the FED? PayPal.
- Get to Mars? Space-X.
- Combat terrorism? Palantir.

The good news is that this spirit is alive among my generation. According to the Reason-Rupe Millennial Survey,¹ 55% of millennials want to start a business... and not merely for financial gain, but also to improve the world around them.

When we are asked what factors lead to our ability to pull this off, we respond: hard work (61%), ambition (39%), and self-discipline (36%). At the bottom of that list — literally the lowest ranked option — was government programs. In fact, 53% say Social Security unlikely to even exist when we retire.²

So largely this means we are a go-it-alone generation. AngelList, LegalZoom, Amazon Web Services, Code Academy and others have all democratized innovation in important ways. But here’s the problem: it isn’t just that government doesn’t get it, it’s that government stops many of us who do.

¹ Ekins, Emily. “The Reason-Rupe 2014 Millennial Survey.” Reason.com. Reason-Rupe, 10 July 2014. Web. 7 Sept. 2015. <<http://reason.com/assets/db/2014-millennials-report.pdf>>

² Ekins, Emily. “The Reason-Rupe 2014 Millennial Survey.” Reason.com. Reason-Rupe, 10 July 2014. Web. 7 Sept. 2015. <<http://reason.com/assets/db/2014-millennials-report.pdf>>

There are burgeoning tech industries such as genomics, mobile health, quantified self, bitcoin, 3D printing, MOOCs, and self driving cars that could dramatically lower costs and improve services that have bearing on many entitlement programs — but are caught in Washington’s crosshairs.

Coursera and Udacity set out to enable everyone the world to access the best professors. The State Department banned the export of their content.

23andMe set out to enable every person to map their genetic code. The FDA, has effectively shut them down.

“It isn’t just that government doesn’t get it, it’s that government stops many of us who do.”

My previous company, Outbox, set out to reduce wasted paper and transportation costs with an alternative to the US Postal Service. In an infamous meeting with the leadership team of USPS, we were told by the head of digital innovation: “Digital is a fad; it will only work in Europe.”

What used to be a benign incompetence — like Senator John McCain’s references to FaceSpace and MyBook — has turned into an active malevolence.

What do Burundi, Afghanistan, and Mongolia have in common? They are all rated by the World Bank as better places for starting a business than the U.S.. In fact, we rank a paltry #46.³

This makes sense when we think about contrast between tech and government:

- We set up websites and web applications with no permission, whereas you need pre-market review.
- We have freedom of speech and marketing, whereas you have quiet periods and off-label marketing bans.
- We drive early adoption, whereas you require licenses.

³ "Economy Rankings." DoingBusiness.org. World Bank Group, 1 June 2014. Web. 7 Sept. 2015. <<http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>>

To summarize: If our motto is "move fast, break things." Yours might as well be: "If you move too fast, we break you."

But there is a new strategy driving companies such as Uber, Airbnb, and, my new company, Able.

When we encounter broken systems, we use technology — and in particular mobile, geo-aware, and socially enabled capabilities — to organize people around a new, high-potential product.

To summarize: If our motto is "Move fast, break things." Yours might as well be: "If you move too fast, we break you."

In the case of my current company Able, Washington has tightened restrictions on banks so that they are much less likely to lend money to small businesses. Facing this, we built the world's first collaborative lending platform so that the Fortune Five Million — those who create two thirds of all jobs and employ half of the workforce — can access the capital they deserve. Small businesses in 40 states can get funded today at <http://www.ablelending.com>.

The companies we support so often express the the spirit I have been describing to you.

A passion for outdoor adventure and love for helping people led Greg McEvily to create a Kammok, a premium outdoor gear brand, whose hammocks and sleeping bags equip and inspire thousands to be more active.

An undiagnosed illness led Kelly Love and Allison Evans on a quest to rid homes of toxic cleaning products. Branch Basics now has over 25,000 fans who get to clean free of toxic chemicals.

What grew from the aftermath post-Katrina New Orleans has become Michael McDaniel's Reaction, inc. — whose modular emergency Exo housing system stacks like a set of coffee cups so it can be rapidly transported down any

US interstate highway and light weight enough that four men can unload enough housing for 100 people in one hour.

These millennial entrepreneurs seek to transform the world they live in through a for profit company that delights its customers, honors its employees and suppliers, and returns a profit to its investors.

In advance of this hearing we asked our community what they thought you should do. I've included those statements in the full testimony and wanted to share that of business owner Joseph Malchow especially.

Joe told us:

Americans are learning, every day, that when government regulates people, prices, and technology, the people lose. What's the price of regulation? Take the cost and convenience of an Uber ride, and subtract it from the cost and inconvenience of a taxi ride. The American people feel the benefits of the idea of creative destruction every day. And they love it. Silicon Valley is turning shadowy regulated industries into genuine marketplaces. It's high time rulemakers got on board.

Once Washington gets on board, it is our hope that you move a little faster, break a few more things, and let us do the same.

Evan Baehr

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Co-Author - *Get Backed*

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Appendix:

A. Able Borrower Manifesto

To give more color on the spirit of Able’s customers and the millions around the United States like them, we share the Able Borrower Manifesto.

<http://blog.ablelending.com/post/127495941483/the-able-borrower-manifesto>

We are the Able 100. We believe our businesses deserve the opportunity to flourish. We refuse to let commercial banks slow our growth. We are enterprising entrepreneurs who believe in hard work and smart planning. We believe it’s not all fun and games. But, we believe that sometimes it is.

Our friends and family believe in us — and we believe in ourselves. Now, Able believes in us, too.

We’re building a network. A network of borrowers and backers. But, more than a network. More than a series of transactions. A community. Because, as the Able 100, we are committed to one another.

We know what only the small businesses owner can know. That it gets lonely sometimes. That it can feel overwhelming. That each accomplishment is only met with the next challenge. That it’s hard to prioritize. That we feel responsible for the people we hire. That owning a business is a sink-or-swim proposition. And that sometimes we feel like we’re treading water. That economic power brokers are ignoring our successes — and blocking our access to more.

But, we also know the way a delighted customer can make our day. That a boost of confidence can be as good as a boost in sales. That when things are clicking, it doesn’t feel like work at all. That our satisfaction is hard won. That it tastes better than the corporate CEOs. That our hustle, our innovation, and our personal touch are all part of something bigger.

In this community, we support one another. We share advice. We make recommendations. We hero each other on social media. Because a rising tide lifts all boats. But also because we like each other. We admire one another. We respect each other’s work.

We bring with us our Backers. The people who have helped us triple the money they’ve loaned us. The people who believe good ideas pay off. The people who are betting on a small business owner they know instead of a mutual fund they don’t.

We believe they deserve a return on their money. Transparency and accountability. To be treated like the rockstars they are.

We believe reputation matters. That who you partner with says a lot about who you are. We believe the team at Able cares about us. Not just as business owners, but as people. We love the way they promote our work and open their doors for advice. We believe Able is more than a loan. Because Able is actually all of us. And our Backers. And maybe it's you, too.

B. Suggested Reading List for Congress

We wanted to include a few of our favorite books and selected quotations to help you get in the mindset of the millennial entrepreneur.

The Lean Startup

Eric Ries

“The only way to win is to learn faster than anyone else.”

“We must learn what customers really want, not what they say they want or what we think they should want.”

“Innovation is a bottoms-up, decentralized, and unpredictable thing, but that doesn’t mean it cannot be managed.”

“When blame inevitably arises, the most senior people in the room should repeat this mantra: if a mistake happens, shame on us for making it so easy to make that mistake.”

Four Steps to the Epiphany

Steve Blank

“‘Build it and they will come’, is not a strategy; it’s a prayer.”

“My advice was to start a policy of making reversible decisions before anyone left the meeting or the office. In a startup, it doesn’t matter if you’re 100 percent right 100 percent of the time. What matters is having forward momentum and a tight fact-based data/metrics feedback loop to help you quickly recognize and reverse any incorrect decisions. That’s why startups are agile.

By the time a big company gets the committee to organize the subcommittee to pick a meeting date, your startup could have made 20 decisions, reversed five of them implemented the fifteen that worked.”

The War of Art

Steven Pressfield

“Are you paralyzed with fear? That’s a good sign. Fear is good. Like self-doubt, fear is an indicator. Fear tells us what we have to do. Remember one rule of thumb: the more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we have to do it.”

“The Principle of Priority states (a) you must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important, and (b) you must do what’s important first.”

Getting Things Done

David Allen

“Much of the stress that people feel doesn’t come from having too much to do. It comes from not finishing what they’ve started.”

“When we truly need to do is often what we most feel like avoiding.”

Get Backed: Craft Your Story, Build the Perfect Pitch Deck, and Launch the Venture of Your Dreams

Evan Baehr & Evan Loomis

“Stories explain, captivate, disturb, and inspire. They can tell us there is something very, very wrong, and they can give us a vision for what we never thought possible. Great stories are about what’s true inside all of us. That’s what makes them work. Entrepreneurship is about telling a story that connects the deep needs of a group of people with a repeatable solution.”

C. #MillennialVoices

When invited to testify before this committee one week ago, we reached out to the Able community to ask them to complete this sentence. “As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know.” Below are their responses.

Allison, John

“Business leaders know big government does not work. They want government to stop promising a ‘free lunch.’ They want less government regulations, less government spending, less complicated and lower taxes. Another words, entrepreneurs want far less government and more freedom.”

Anderson, Kristen Soltis

“Young Americans are not ideological. They just want things fixed. Their focus is less on the process than on the outcome. If government can provide the best outcome, that’s fine, but if the private sector, nonprofit sector, communities or individuals are best suited to solve the problem at hand, they’ll favor that path. The outcome they want most for entitlements? Security for their parents and grandparents, control and flexibility for themselves. They feel responsible for caring for aging loved ones. At the same time, they want to be the ones directing their own retirement plans.”

Anderson, Michael

“Anything other than a level playing field is demoralizing. Small business is worth fighting for.”

Archambault, Josh

“Regulators must turn inward to remove regulation that prevents lower-cost, high-quality healthcare options to emerge — similar to Southwest or Uber in the transportation industry. Soon patients will also make this connection. Those that care about education, infrastructure, lower taxes, and other public priorities, must demand Congress empower entrepreneurs to reward patients for being value-seekers, otherwise their programs will continue to experience less investment.”

Arison, George

“Comprehensive immigration reform is critical to building our economy and remaining globally competitive. We want to encourage the best and the brightest to come to this country. I immigrated to the United States as a young boy from the former Soviet Union and used that opportunity to graduate from college and build a successful company. I’m living proof of the American Dream and I believe that expanding that opportunity will only make our country greater.”

Athar, Ainee

“Hiring the best tech talent is important. Our innovation economy hinges on Congress passing immigration reform.”

Atkinson, Andrew

“As a small business owner, I want congress to know that excessive and unnecessary regulations and restrictions are doing more harm to small businesses than they are protecting them. Government would be wise to get out of the way and get back to what they were originally intended to do: 1) protect the rights of the citizens 2) protect the country from foreign threats. Anything more than that is excessive and inconvenient over reach.”

Baer, Josh

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that immigrants are our best source of entrepreneurs. We need to attract and retain them or those jobs and innovation will go elsewhere. America is a nation founded by immigrants and we can’t afford to turn away any educated entrepreneurs.”

Baron, Jonathan

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that large businesses often encourage new taxes and regulations to undermine emerging competitors and disadvantaging smaller firms less able to bear the costs. Lawmakers should beware industry incumbents championing more intrusive government.

Belinfante, Josh

“Entitlements are my generations albatross. They prevent comprehensive tax reform and rate reductions, undercut national defense, stymie medical advances, and tether Americans to a dated retirement system that neither I nor my children will likely benefit from. My generation did not ask for them, and we seek leaders with the courage to make them work.”

Benard, Alexander

“As an American running a small business that is based overseas, I think it is important for Congress to know the challenges that have resulted from FATCA. We have to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every year for an accounting firm to help us make various complex FATCA-related filings. Banks do not want our business because then they will have to make FATCA filings, and some companies do not want to partner with us for the same reason. Fortune 500 companies can navigate around these challenges, but FATCA is really crushing American small businesses that are active overseas.”

Benson, Guy

“I want Congress to end the reckless project of generational theft and to reform our important social safety net programs to ensure their long-term solvency and viability. It is unfair and wrong to make promises without a sustainable plan to pay for them.”

Betts, Weston

“I want Congress to know that having an open perspective with minimal red tape on disruptive technologies, such as cryptocurrencies and ride sharing companies, is essential to the United States fostering a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.”

Blanchard, Dave

“We are in a unique moment in history where entrepreneurs have disproportionate influence on our society. Not only do these visionaries create incredible economic value and countless jobs, they also greatly shape the very cultural foundations of our country. Through the work of their hands, they shape our collective imagination, from what we consume, practice, believe, and desire to the financing of the social challenges in the nonprofit sector. Consequently, we should do everything we can as a country to promote, support, and develop the economic potential and moral imagination of these critical leaders.”

Bowerman, Jerry

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know access to high quality, affordable higher education is critical for equipping our national talent for success in our information economy. Funding higher education with huge loans is going to handicap our workforce for decades.”

Boyden, Adam

“Help the friends and families of entrepreneurs fund the growth of business by removing costs and regulations.”

Boyuls, Malachi

“As an entrepreneur and businessman, I want Congress to know I work hard to earn a living and provide for my family. I make difficult decisions everyday to ensure we are secure for years to come. We also strive to use our resources to help others — often, those who cannot help themselves. Yet, the more government grows and the the more money Congress demands in taxes, the more difficult those decisions become. We the people are fundamentally better suited than Congress to make those decisions.”

Calhoun, Reid

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that without significant reform in small business taxes, especially those affecting online sales, many entrepreneurs will choose not to start businesses. Before a company makes its first dollar, or hires its first employee, it must raise more significant capital than ever in order to keep up with rising taxes.”

Charnaux, Christian

“Beware of regulation that limits the choice and control of consumers. Government bias is towards control over choice, at which point millennial consumers are likely to choose new representatives.”

Chougule, Pratik

“America’s ability to promote democracy and human rights around the world depends on fiscal responsibility at home.”

Cobb, Chesterton

“Millennial entrepreneurs do not desire the absence of constraints, rules, and regulations. We want dynamic constraints generated by the marketplace, rules that can evolve and compete, and the regulatory power of consumer demand. Our world is changing faster than any politician or bureaucrat can keep up with. We need the freedom to constantly improve rules to match the future, instead of being shackled by rules that match special interest, or ‘the way we have always done things.’ ”

Cook, Rodney

“We build monuments, parks, museums, civic squares and memorials surrounded by live/work/play communities. Our signature is on the Charter for the New Urbanism and also the Institute of Classical Architecture and Art. We, along with these and other organizations are trying to make American urban centers more livable for all Americans. Federal, state and city governments have created such bloated bureaucracy that little can be accomplished due to automotive zoning, unorthodox competitions for federal buildings or simple municipal building permits being obtained efficiently despite the cry from the American People that they desire, even need/require what we offer.”

Cox, Stephen

“As an entrepreneurship enthusiast who spent 20 years in small businesses, large corporations, government, in technology, space, law enforcement, and oil, I’ve worked with hundreds of millennials, but never met one who believes social security will be there for them. We twenty-somethings, thirty-somethings, and forty-somethings would gladly give up some of our own rights to Social Security and Medicare if Congress could fix the safety net for those who need it while reducing our taxes.”

Dokupil, Susanna

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that the ballooning price of college education is killing the American dream for many bright students. Easily available loans encourage college-bound students to take on crushing levels of debt to get the best education they can at the institution with the best facilities. Meanwhile, institutions must compete for these largely price-insensitive students by building better facilities, which in turn create rising costs, which in turn create demand for more loans. Get the government out of funding higher education, and let the market set tuition costs.”

Elaguizy, Amir

“I’ve started two companies that have created hundreds of US jobs and I can honestly say neither would be possible without the talented entrepreneurs we’ve relied upon that were originally from Sweden, Mexico, India and China. Talent is globalized but when I hire them the real economic impact that they create is local.”

Erwin, Scott

“America’s preeminence in terms of being the destination of choice for the most ambitious entrepreneurs in world remains certain but is not guaranteed to always be the case. Outdated immigration laws and the rising cost of living in US start up hubs are cause for concern and increased competition from other global hubs (e.g., London, Berlin) should be noted!”

Eyerly, Wade

“As a champion of small business and entrepreneurship I want congress to know that every process has an error rate, and just as companies grapple with some poor hires as they work to develop strong teams, the federal government will be stronger and more responsive to the nations needs (thereby better protecting the American worker) if it can acknowledge an error rate in their hiring process, and make it easier for managers to move on from underperforming employees. The federal government employs a great many hardworking dedicated civil servants. Their work is too often encumbered by a culture that treats performers and non performers alike.”

Fail, Brandon

“Entrepreneurs require intellectual freedom, fair and competitive markets, access to capital, and affordable, high-quality labor. To safeguard true freedom, Congress should immediately end the unconstitutional and unnecessary practice of mass surveillance. To make markets more fair and competitive, Congress should eliminate all forms of protectionism for incumbent companies – including those found in the corporate tax code. To enhance access to capital (and democratize entrepreneurial investment), Congress should expand options for crowdfunding and eliminate the big banks’ control over securities offerings. And to make hiring cheaper – to actually create jobs – Congress should cut payroll and individual-income taxes for all earners.”

Fineman, Meredith

“I want congress to know how entrepreneurship and small business can change the lives of women. As a female entrepreneur, it’s a particular sense of empowerment, risk, savvy, and work that combine to create a life that I could not have imagined – I built it. I hope that other women get the same opportunities I do – and that there is better access to small business loans and encouragement for women to start businesses.”

Finn, Mindy

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that reducing the barriers to start and run new business enables entrepreneurs to focus on what matters: improving their product or service and attracting customers. Deciding to take the leap to start a new business shouldn’t hinge on whether you can raise or invest enough to cover the onerous legal challenges to do so.”

Flow, Don

“The power to imagine and to make that imagination a reality is the heart of entrepreneurship. It requires enormous effort, huge risk, and a total commitment to ‘sleep on the floor’ if that is what is required. Entrepreneurship is embedded in the deepest cultural narrative of America and anything that stifles it diminishes the current that has made our country great. We need to do everything possible to open wide the floodgates of entrepreneurship because it is there that the intersection of economic, social, and intellectual capital create extraordinary new ways to engage and change the world.”

Gibson, Brett

“Creating companies requires hard work and focus. Congress has a role to play in supporting entrepreneurs by keeping taxes and regulations low so founders can spend more time with customers and less time with complicated tax code and exorbitant legal fees.”

Gober, Chris

“The successful small business is not a consequence of government action; rather, it is built on the back of individuals with the audacity to pursue the American dream and the perseverance to overcome the inevitable adversities along the way. Most were willing to leave stable employment, many were willing to put their personal savings at risk, and all know firsthand that signing a paycheck requires more work than receiving one. The American dream is not about guaranteeing success; it’s about guaranteeing the freedom to take initiative where others do not and the ability to beat the odds when others cannot.”

Gordon, Chuck

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want congress to know that archaic labor laws, particularly the exempt/non-exempt laws make absolutely no sense at all in the context of start up technology companies and I frequently have to sacrifice my company’s culture and make bad business decisions to comply with them.

Greer, Peter

“I want Congress to know that entrepreneurship needs to start young. To ensure vibrancy in America, we need a new vision of the power and potential of entrepreneurship, beginning in elementary school. Time to bring back lemonade stands, business fairs, and stories of social entrepreneurs who have positively impacted their communities and our country. Don’t underestimate the power and potential of youth to work, save and invest.”

Grizzle, Heather

“People respond to incentives. Tax things, you get less of them. What do we want less of and what do we want more of?”

Gundersen, Mark

“Heavy regulations create a competitive moat around incumbent businesses. Entrepreneurs and their up-start enterprises simply don’t have the scale or financial resources to hire legions of compliance professionals and government affairs staff. If Congress is serious about helping small businesses, start by reducing regulations and enacting tax reform.”

Hand, Mark

“The Kauffman Foundation recently put out a number of excellent reports about how governments can support innovation. Because innovation is inherently combinatorial, one immediate way the federal government could help is passing immigration reform – more criss-crossing of ideas from around the world means more innovation.”

Hanna, Frank

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that entrepreneurs contribute far more to society than they receive back; indeed, they serve as indispensable leaven to every community in which they live. However, they are not machines – they are human beings, and thus can be encouraged, or discouraged. They are encouraged by the opportunities of life, but every time, EVERY TIME, Congress adds an additional regulation, or an additional tax, it discourages the entrepreneur. Governments can indeed kill entrepreneurship, and thereby impoverish their societies. Entrepreneurship is not a machine; it is the result of courageous human beings.”

Harris, Britt

“Properly functioning societies rely on the wisdom of crowds rather than the perceived insights and views of any single man, or group of men. This is the great secret of capitalism which has outperformed all other economic concepts in both the alleviation of poverty and the creation of higher standards of living. The independent crowd, left lawfully to its own devices, can not only weigh an ox and accurately name the number of jelly beans in a jar, it can create the world’s most stunning and least predictable advances. This excellent system only requires six things: independence, diversity, fair and honest aggregation, decentralization, freedom and the right to the full results of your own efforts, whether they are weak or strong.”

Harder, Cherie

“I want Congress to know that saddling a new generation with an unbearable debt burden erodes the public trust, economic opportunity, and their chances for mobility. Americans want a strong safety net for those who need it, but now are stuck paying for a entitlement system that will bankrupt our future.”

Hartley, Scott

“Complicated problem solving is fact based, and can follow a set of rules. Complex problem solving, as is required in both governance and start-ups, is not fact-based. It’s pattern based, and requires domain emergence. This means engaging a problem from multiple angles, asking the right questions to uncover data, and then using that data to inform swift action, either to continue a pursued course of action, or pivot. It requires sacrificing pride, which Thomas Hobbes called false consciousness, and iterating toward progress.”

Hastings, Christopher

“For the Millennial Generation, a few policy advances could be helpful to increase the number of startups and to make the process less burdensome. Offering a matched investment program so that every dollar invested in a new or small business is matched with contributions to Social Security. Offering forbearance on student loans, federal and private, while an individual is engaged in working on a startup at least 50% of their working time. Offering federal tax relief until a startup reaches a notable revenue threshold. Offering subsistence level medical coverage for those engaged in entrepreneurial activities.”

Henderson, Bryan

“Our generation needs true leadership on entitlement reform — leadership that believes that the people’s minds can be won and is willing to give up prestige and position, if necessary, to act on this belief. We understand sacrifice and needs leaders who do, too.

Hewitt, Hugh

“I want a government that regulates well, but which does so at the speed of the private sector and with the recognition that time is indeed money, profits and jobs. The government has to recognize it cannot kill business with sheer delay and inertia in making decisions.”

Huizinga, Daniel

“I want Congress to give Americans a shot. I’ve written about hundreds of entrepreneurs and small businesses on opportunitylives.com, and time and time again, I hear stories from people with great ideas who have to spend so much time working to overcome the burdensome regulations in order to make their idea a reality.”

Jargo, Dean

“Entrepreneurs and small businesses that are adding true value to society are doing so in spite of government, not because of government.”

Johnson, Garrett *“The 30 year decline in new business/firm creation is a crisis. We need more job creators, not less. Lyft, Uber, AirBnB and others empower everyday Americans to be self-employed, in seconds. This is “Right to Work 2.0” and government should not stand in the way.”*

Jones-Dilworth, Josh

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that crushing student loan debt is forcing our best brightest to make life and career decisions that do not maximize their potential. We can turn one job into three or more if we can manage to reduce, delay, or forgive this debt, in part or in whole.”

Kohlmann, Benjamin

“It’s not just limited to the private sector. Public sector millennials are trying to energize their organizations through entrepreneurship within bureaucracy utilizing grassroots movements like the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum and others.”

Kwan, Josh

“Our nation benefits by being an importer of entrepreneurial talent from the world, and that we serve as a benefactor to the world by being an exporter of entrepreneurial ideas & values, goods & services. Crafting policies and nurturing a fertile environment for startups and small businesses will continue drawing the world’s top talent, who end up pursuing in America their dreams of a better mousetrap, a new way to fly, a breakthrough in our understanding of the universe. Cultivating this garden of entrepreneurs leads to material abundance, yes, and also a surplus of dignity, liberty, and creativity.”

Levy, Frayda

“As a small business owner, I saw how government programs undermined the work ethic of upstanding citizens. I would over hear comments by employees who would complain that ‘it’s not fair’ when another employee told of his or her special government benefit such as voucher or receiving earned income credit money – which was much more than what the others received. These benefits tended to corrupt those who were the least hard working employees.”

Locy, Jason

“The combination of higher and higher wage expectations from employees (who have been sold the American Dream and now need to fund it) along with high taxes on small businesses makes it difficult for a startup to scale. Especially when you want to move from a 5-6 person business to a 12-15. I see this in my own business and in the 100s of entrepreneurs I consult with.”

Long, Liang

“Small business still has challenges accessing capital easily and efficiently. Congress should create better policies to enable immigrant entrepreneurs to help drive the U.S. economy by starting small businesses. More financing innovations such as Able Lending should be widely accessible to entrepreneurs. The new millennial entrepreneurs such as myself are extremely tech-oriented and are used to do everything online and have everything digitalized - Congress needs to adapt as well!”

Lowery, William

“The Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act, known as FATCA, and other aspects of US tax law prevent US citizens from exporting ideas and building America’s reputation for creativity and ingenuity. These laws burden those building tomorrow’s economy. Expatriate ambassadors for the American economy deserve support, not suspicion. A lawsuit against FATCA with eight counts of constitutional violations has already been filed by Republicans Overseas, but Congress can provide needed relief today.”

MacDonald, Anne

“Our generation wants to feel the wind at their back, and the confidence that their government is 150% behind their hopes and dreams to make us a more fully living, prosperous nation. Current strictures from regulatory agencies, and stifling limitations placed on borrowing have made perhaps the highest educated and biggest dreaming generation of all time feel constraint and confusion on how to move ahead instead of limitless possibilities. We encourage and even urge the Budget Committee to everything in its power to continue to reduce burdens on what could be unleashed.”

MacGuineas, Maya

“Allowing entitlement spending to continue to grow faster than the economy is unsustainable and will place growing pressure on small businesses as these programs place ever growing pressure on taxes. We can put these programs on a fiscally sustainable course with smart reforms that ensure they continue to provide the support beneficiaries need, and doing so will provide a boost to business confidence by removing an ongoing source of pressure for ever greater taxes.”

Macia, Maria

“I believe that flexibility and trusting individuals to make the best decisions for themselves given their greater knowledge about themselves is at the heart of economic growth. We have gotten better and better at absorbing information, so government policies that increase information and free individuals to make their own decisions add the most value.”

MacKay, Brian

“I’ve lived all over the world, and the U.S. has been the best place where people can think for themselves and cultivate small businesses. We have things like Facebook and Uber because people think outside the box and are encouraged to do so in becoming entrepreneurs and making a profit. Supporting small businesses encourages creativity and growth, which is so important to our communities.”

Malchow, Joe

“Americans are learning, every day, that when government regulates people, prices, and technology, the people lose. What’s the price of regulation? Take the cost and convenience of an Uber ride, and subtract it from the cost and inconvenience of a taxi ride. The American people feel the benefits of the Schumpeterian idea of creative destruction every day. And they love it. Silicon Valley is turning shadowy regulated industries into genuine marketplaces. It’s high time rulemakers got on board. Because when a Silicon Valley coder can release a new product to one billion people at the stroke of a key, he or she is, in the final analysis, going to prevail.”

Mannina, Michael

“We must have leadership from Washington to tackle the tough issue of entitlement reform. Every year we postpone makes it a more costly venture. Soon, the debt entitlements yield will completely stifle America’s small business engine.

Maples, Mike

“When something is not working, the worst approach is to double down on it.”

Mark, Daniel

“As a college professor, I regularly hear young people’s concerns about the job market. They want – and deserve – a thriving and dynamic economy that is friendly to entrepreneurship and small businesses. They have ideas and energy, and mostly they just want to be free to be at their innovative best. They certainly don’t want to all be funneled into the same few professions, but they need to believe there are wider opportunities out there for them. Without market-friendly policies, they are all going to end up in law school.”

Maurais, Zac

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know Washington needs some serious ‘user experience’ redesign. Anyone go to the DMV or Post Office lately? Enough said.”

McKoon, Joshua

“Entitlement reform is absolutely essential to our future. Current entitlement spending is unsustainable and places us on a path of economic ruin. I would urge members of both parties to find a way to reform entitlements to provide flexibility for younger people while placing us on a path of sustainability.”

Metcalf, Bob

“What entrepreneurs need most from governments is to be left alone to pursue Free Enterprise. Every time government adds a program, entrepreneurs die. If anything, governments should support research at competing universities, because they graduate students, some of whom use startups to scale innovations into world markets. In my experience, progress is maximized when there is freedom of choice among competing alternatives (FOCAC). Oh, FCC regulating Internet is a bad idea.”

Monshaugen, Shawn

"Stress and quality of life from traffic-congestion dictates moral/ethical behavior. It's time to invest in a culture shift for how we work, live, and commute. WORK: adjust hours of operations. LIVE: reduce sprawl, get vertical, incentivize car-free housing developments. COMMUTE: the largest mass-transit system in existence is the current vehicles on the road that are all going the same direction with empty seats. Invest in technology and safe roadside pickup points (similar to bus stops)"

Muir, Brandon

"Entrepreneurship is a choice; it is a risk. The environment our government and regulatory infrastructure create directly impact this choice. Congress must understand that entrepreneurs - not government - ultimately choose where and if growth happens. Our business environment is but one throughout the world. Each day government spends attempting to protect some entity - a consumer, a locality, a business - our economy and people fall further from unleashing the potential our democracy possesses."

Niknejad, Tony

"We are always on the lookout for ways to avoid hiring additional employees, simply because there are far too many additional costs to hiring beyond wage. Reforms intended to help individuals do not need to be driven through the employer in order to work."

Norquist, Grover

"We know there is a wall of spending coming directly towards America: our unfunded entitlement liabilities. That tsunami will arrive at the expense of today's young Americans and today's start up companies: like a plague it will bring no good news, but the young will perish in larger numbers."

Palanjian, Lara

"Entrepreneurs are at bottom artists, creative types. They desire space to imagine, grow, think outside the box, not laws that restrict their ability to do so. No good director would tell an actress to stop exploring different ways to communicate her emotions to the audience. The same applies here. Would Congress please ask at every step: will this initiative expand the actor's stage or restrict it?"

Paton, Ryon

"Our investments and innovations occur in the agricultural/grower environment, where over regulation at the State or Federal level can make it increasingly difficult for us to get essential foods to the global market. As we know, the growing global footprint is shrinking, while population growth continues on a significant upward trajectory. Given this, it is critical that State and Federal Governments do not restrict or unnecessarily encumber land use and the associated natural resources necessary to produce meaningful essential proteins that these populations require for their survival."

Pavlich, Katie

"Excessive and unnecessary federal government regulation kills the American Dream."

Pellegrini, Georgia *“Small business owners are used to taking action. Passing more legislation, unless it is legislation to do away with existing laws and regulations that are choking us, is not action. It is just an excuse for staying in Washington.”*

Rivetna, Eric

“Small businesses are what make my community special and unique.”

Robinson, Paige

“I want Congress to know: How hard it is to create a new business. When the tax code is so complicated that it costs you thousands of dollars to simply comply, it puts a big burden on small businesses. It makes something that is hard already that much harder.”

Salam, Reihan

“Entitlement reform is about much more than debt and deficits. It is fundamentally about the kind of economy we will have in the decades to come. Will we have a dynamic, high-growth economy that generates high-wage job opportunities for every American willing to work? Or will we suffer from the economic sclerosis that has ravaged so much of southern Europe? To create a more sustainable safety net, we can’t just double down on the programs we’ve inherited from previous generation. We need to look to the goals our safety net programs were designed to achieve and develop smarter, better, more cost-effective ways of meeting them.”

Sepulveda, Eugene

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know it is again time to invest in the American Dream, in America’s equality of opportunity. We built America’s middle class by investing in our physical and social infrastructure. We must reverse the trend of under investing in those programs which help America’s middle class — especially public schools, universities and its social programs.”

Sharma, Manu

“Allow alternative lenders to innovate freely, but have enough oversight to weed out bad actors and dubious business practices early so they do not give the entire industry a bad reputation.”

Sheffield, Carrie

“Regulations accelerated the demise of community banking. This harms young, aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly those of color, who need capital and struggle with lending policies of bigger banks. Rolling back regulatory red tape will help young entrepreneurs. Flawed government loan policies have also saddled my generation with student debt, discouraging risk-taking and business formation, according to The Federal Reserve. This stems from policies that do not reflect marketplace educational demands or encourage critical thinking about whether college is an investment or consumption. It also stems from an incongruous hostility toward for-profit colleges without holding non-profit institutions to similar standards.”

Shorter, Tiffany

“These debates on the longevity of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid must end with actionable solutions. Unsustainable fiscal policies hinder our ability to provide for our families, contribute to our communities and pursue the American dream.”

Silkoff, Jesse

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that the immense cost of higher education for our individual students stifles many people from the chance at entrepreneurship for years. Until their debt is reduced. Our country has so many brilliant people that would love to take the risk of starting a business, but feel crippled to do so from this looming educational debt. We need to find ways to give people the quality of “college-level education” (or better), at a lower cost.”

Simmons, Brandon

“I’ve seen firsthand the unique power of entrepreneurship: friends and relatives who were unmotivated by low wage jobs working for someone else but found passion by creating startups and traditional small businesses. The values of ownership, responsibility, initiative, and leadership all flow from entrepreneurship, and the best thing we can do for entrepreneurs is get out of their way. After years working with small businesses and startups, I can think of no better example of the principle that less government interference leads to more human flourishing.”

Simnick, David

“Entrepreneurs want to create something out of nothing to make the world a better place. To solve a need. To fix a problem. I often find that successful entrepreneurs are not usually in it for the money, rather focused on building something that is truly meaningful. Money just becomes the fuel to fix more problems.”

Snyder, Pete

“As a champion of small business and entrepreneurship I want Congress to know that free markets make for free people. Excessive government regulation creates huge hindrances for entrepreneurs and job creators and greatly thwarts innovation. It’s time to unleash the power of the U.S. Economy and in order to do so, we need to take the restrictor plates off the true engines of economic growth - America’s entrepreneurs and small businesses.”

Smith, Brandon

“Today, countless Americans are feeling the impact of government over-regulation. Occupational licensing keeps many from entering the profession of their choice. They feel the a sense of economic insecurity due to the long term unsustainable nature of our entitlement programs which risk losing the safety net for those living paycheck to paycheck. Today, millions of young Americans are crying out for reform of entitlements, of industry, of how government works. We can continue to offer hope and opportunity only if we embrace innovation and deregulation.”

Smith, Brad

“As CEO of a healthcare company serving some of our nation’s sickest patients, I have seen first-hand that our traditional healthcare system far too often results in care that is uncoordinated, inappropriate and sometimes unnecessary. At Aspire Health, we have found that having a physician-led team visit patients in their homes can dramatically improve patients’ quality of life while also significantly reducing their need to go to the hospital. Unfortunately, our care is not funded by traditional fee-for-service Medicare. As a result, while we are growing rapidly and serving thousands of patients in the Medicare Advantage program, we are not able to serve patients on traditional fee-for-service Medicare. Our hope is that CMS will continue to learn from successes in the Medicare Advantage program and adopt those best practices across the traditional Medicare program.”

Starr, Lauren

“As a champion of entrepreneurship and small business, I want Congress to know that good health care can save lives, but unreasonable health care policies can cost jobs — and ultimately the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. Forcing small businesses to increase wages and pay for the health insurance of employees who may not be taking good care of themselves impedes growth. If employers are to pay for employees’ health choices, employees must be held accountable for their health choices and behaviors. Otherwise the burden is on small businesses — and ultimately the growth of the American economy.”

Stephens, Trae

“Current federal technology procurement processes discourage product innovation and pass advantages along to bespoke services vendors. The best advances of our generation were not requested via a requirements process in which bureaucrats told entrepreneurs exactly how to build their incremental version of the future. They were built by visionaries with a passion for building truly original technologies pulled from the stretches of their imagination. Unfortunately, these visionaries aren’t very adept with revolving door hiring practices, unlike [enter name of large systems integrator of choice here], so they tend to lose or get forced into second-class-citizen partnership with lots of overhead.”

Stolhandske, Matt

“Anyone can be an entrepreneur. You can create all the programs and initiatives with as targeted access as you want, and nothing could ever be as effective as the basic fundamentals of entrepreneurship. Innovation and entrepreneurship are found in every type of human being on this planet; they know no racial, gender, socioeconomic or other boundaries. Harness them to drive economic growth in every sector and at every level of our economy. Stifle them at our peril.”

Suhr, Daniel

“I appreciate what you all are trying to do here. Taking on big, systemic challenges like entitlement reform is tough stuff. Real reform takes courageous politicians who are willing to put the next generation ahead of the next election. Keep fighting for us and we’ll keep fighting for leaders who are willing to take a stand.”

Urbahn, Keith

“That the tax regime for pass-through entities is a mind boggling hot mess. Instead of paying thousands of dollars to accountants to help us navigate an insane tax code, I’d rather invest it in my company and people.”

Vanderbeck, Sunny

“The ultimate public-private partnership is one where everyday citizens become extraordinary entrepreneurs, lifting each other other up and moving our nation forward. Conscious companies are the core delivery system for caring for the nation’s people—and a philosophy of conscious capitalism guides companies to care for their employees, their communities, their customers, and all their stakeholders.”

Venverloh, Jon

“Secured and unsecured loans are too difficult to get even for well capitalized borrowers with excellent credit and a good track record. Large entities with lots of staff can manage the current process and borrow efficiently, but smaller ones often cannot. Today’s policies under Dodd Frank inadvertently favor big business over entrepreneurs and small businesses and must be corrected. Banks should have more latitude in assessing borrowers’ creditworthiness.”

Wanta, Steve

“As a champion of entrepreneurship as a force for good, I want Congress to know that we need to reimagine a system that works for every business. Access to capital is a fundamental building block that has become a barrier to growth for our country’s small businesses. For the poor and the most marginalized entrepreneurs, capital remains unattainable. It is our responsibility to create a society that supports everyone on their journey to realize their full potential.”

Watkins, Nathan

“Patient growth capital at a reasonable cost and useful proportion is a struggle for early stage businesses with proven concepts. Neither capital priced according to new venture risk nor capital priced according to a bankable balance sheet is of much use to entrepreneurs who’ve bootstrapped through startup but not yet achieved “bankable” status. There are seemingly few services/sources for minority equity positions in the \$500K-4M range where proof of concept mitigates start-up risks.”

Warren, William

“The best thing Congress could do to encourage job growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship is to get out of the way. Founders, investors, employees and customers around the U.S. benefit when the U.S. is the most business-friendly economy in the world; the free market has proven time and again that it can best allocate resources to enable world-beating businesses such as Facebook and Airbnb and Uber to thrive.”

Zappacosta, Marco

“I want Congress to know that millions of small business owners are struggling to get by. Thumbtack pros tell us every day that they face too many layers of red tape. Government leaders must dig deep to understand the practical effects of the regulations they write — entrepreneurs like the small business owners on Thumbtack have the talent and imagination it takes to succeed; they just need the government to be a partner, not a barrier.”

Zhang, Kevin

“America is a country where regardless of one’s race, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, hard work, persistence and integrity will lead to prosperity and human flourishing.”