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U.S. AbilityOne Commission Leaders Preside Over First FY2018 Commission Meeting

ARLINGTON, Va. -- Chairperson James M. Kesteloot and Vice Chairperson Thomas D. Robinson presided together over the U.S. AbilityOne Commission's first fiscal year 2018 meeting at the October 2017 National Industries for the Blind (NIB) / National Association for the Employment of People Who Are Blind (NAEPB) Training Conference and Expo.

Kesteloot continues as chairperson, a role to which he was first elected by the Commission in 2015 and re-elected in July of this year. Robinson, the Department of the Air Force Representative to the Commission, assumed his new role as vice chairperson.

"I am honored to continue serving the Commission as chairperson, and delighted that Tom Robinson joins me as vice chairperson," Kesteloot said. "Tom's knowledge of federal procurement is an invaluable asset to the Commission. The AbilityOne Program is transforming itself through a period of significant changes and challenges. I know that every Commission member shares our commitment to enhancing program oversight while creating jobs for people who are blind or have significant disabilities."

Kesteloot is acknowledged nationwide as a leading figure in the blindness community and a pioneer in fighting for jobs for people who are blind or visually impaired. Before becoming chairperson in 2015, he was twice elected as vice chairperson from 2011 to 2015. He was appointed to the Commission by President Barack H. Obama in 2010, filling one of four private citizen positions on the 15-member Commission. As the former president and executive director of the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind, Kesteloot transformed that century-old agency into a nationally respected social service organization with a global reach.

Kesteloot has consulted for many organizations and served on numerous councils, including appointments by Illinois Governors James R. Thompson and Jim Edgar to the state Blind Services Planning Council, and an appointment by Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley to his Task Force for the Employment of People with Disabilities.

Robinson is the Director of Contracting, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, and is responsible for programs valued at more than \$196 billion in active contracts. He was appointed by President Obama in 2013 to be the Air Force representative on the Commission.

Robinson guides contracting policy for seven operating locations, ensures workforce development for more than 2,000 contracting professionals, and manages a support and contract execution staff of more than 200. He guides more than \$31 billion in annual obligations for 10 Program Executive Officers and two Direct Report Divisions. He is also responsible for more than 550 Air Force, joint and allied warfighting programs including F-22 and F-16 fighter aircraft; C-17 and C-5 cargo aircraft; KC-46 tanker aircraft; B-1 and B-2 bomber aircraft; and Predator, Global Hawk and Reaper remotely piloted aircraft.

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About the U.S. AbilityOne Commission and AbilityOne Program

The AbilityOne Program is a source of employment for more than 46,000 people who are blind or have significant disabilities, including approximately 3,000 veterans, at more than 550 nonprofit agencies nationwide, across 15 time zones including all 50 states and Guam.

AbilityOne provided more than \$3.3 billion of products and services to the federal government in fiscal year 2016. The program operates at more than 1,000 locations representing 40 government agencies, including 150 Base Supply Centers at military and government installations.

AbilityOne's largest customer is the Department of Defense, which procures more than \$1.7 billion of AbilityOne products and services annually.

The program is administered by the U.S. AbilityOne Commission, the operating name of the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, and is an independent federal agency. The Commission is comprised of 15 Presidential appointees, with 11 representing federal agencies and four serving as private citizens who are knowledgeable about the obstacles to employment of people who are blind or have significant disabilities. The Commission is assisted by two central nonprofit agencies, National Industries for the Blind and SourceAmerica, in administering the AbilityOne Program.

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