Heather Wilson
U.S. Congresswoman

News Release

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Albuquerque High-Tech Company In line for $2 Million Federal Defense Funds

Wilson-Secured Funding Will Create 10 high-tech jobs in NM

Albuquerque, NM — As many as 10 high-tech, high-wage jobs could be created in Albuquerque through a $2 million appropriation Congresswoman Heather Wilson has secured for a fingerprint device the U.S. military wants to deploy in Afghanistan and Iraq in the war on terror. The fingerprint scanning device, invented and developed by Albuquerque company Lumidigm, could help identify and stop terrorists and insurgents.

The device would be used in the military's Biometrics Automated Toolset (BAT) program, which is already being used throughout Afghanistan and Iraq to keep a database of terrorists, insurgents, local workers, and detainees. The BAT system works by scanning the iris of an eye to take a unique picture and storing it with other information like names, front facial pictures, and fingerprints to form a profile. The profile also provides information about an individual's past record, for example, if the person had been detained before or is wanted for illegal activity.

Currently, fingerprints are a secondary ID form despite their unique nature because of unreliable technology that tends to not work in difficult or rugged conditions. Lumidigm's groundbreaking device changes that and military planners hope to field test the company's device in both Iraq and Afghanistan and incorporate the device into the existing BAT program. Overall, the BAT system simplifies the tracking of people in and around military bases in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and other important strategic regions and Wilson says Lumidigm's fingerprint light-scanner will enhance BAT's effectiveness.

"Lumidigm's fingerprint scanner will help the men and women of the U.S. military as they do their jobs in very difficult circumstances," says Wilson. "Current fingerprint readers are problem-prone when used in rugged conditions. But Lumidigm's deployment of technology uses multiple wavelengths of light in a scanner that is small, easy-to-use, reliable, and rugged. This investment is good national security policy, and it's also good for New Mexico's high-tech economy."

The Albuquerque company already employs 29 people and says it will likely hire an additional 10 personnel to complete the Army Intelligence work Wilson seeks to fund.

With the BAT system in place, a Marine working at a gate or check point can collect biometric data from an individual, search the database in the computer, and look for a match with the many other records already in the database.

"We have been working closely with Lumidigm as they develop a rugged, portable, and affordable fingerprint scanner for military and law enforcement field applications," said Kathy DeBolt, Program Manager for the Biometrics Automated Toolset (BAT) at the U.S. Army Intelligence Center. "We expect prototypes of this scanner to be integrated into the BAT system and deployed in Afghanistan

—More—

and Iraq for field testing."

Biometric identification via fingerprint scanning is integral to homeland security and military deployments. However, current fingerprint technology has serious operational deficiencies. Designed for indoor, climate-controlled environments, it does not meet the requirements for field operations. It is slow, finicky, and unreliable in even the most common of conditions.

Lumidigm uses different colors of light to collect fingerprints at and beneath the surface of the skin. Unlike other fingerprint technologies, Lumidigm's multispectral imaging enables fast, reliable capture of fingerprints in all types of field conditions, including those encountered in a soldier's or police officer's typical work day.

"Heather Wilson has supported us over the years as we developed our multispectral imaging technology into a national security tool," said Lumidigm President and CEO Bob Harbour. "Her sponsorship of this project for 2008 brings military visibility to Lumidigm and allows us another opportunity to prove a New Mexico technology in the field."

Lumidigm's fingerprint sensor can enhance a variety of missions and applications like force protection, civilian disaster assistance, border security, law enforcement and intelligence collection efforts.

Wilson says she secured the funding in the 2008 Defense Appropriations Act that passed in the U.S. House on August 4 just before the House adjourned. The bill must still pass the Senate and be signed into law by the President for the funding to be finalized.

"Lumidigm is making a significant economic impact on New Mexico," said John Besonne, Vice President and Regional Director for Private Equity at Fort Washington Capital Partners. "By the end of this year, Lumidigm will be exporting high-end biometric sensors in large volumes to a world-wide market. This is a marquee company and a huge asset in a technology-forward New Mexico."

Wilson has previously secured funding for one of Lumidigm's sister companies, TruTouch. That company is using laser-light to determine blood alcohol levels in individuals and Wilson secured nearly $1 million for a pilot project with the Bernalillo County Sheriff's office. Deputies have already test-run the device in field sobriety check points with positive results, and the company continues to develop the product for field use by law enforcement officials throughout the country. The device could also be developed into a next-generation ignition interlock device that works automatically and is fool-proof.

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