
**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF
COMMERCE
NEWS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20230**



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE CELEBRATES AFRICAN AMERICAN
HISTORY MONTH WITH WHITE HOUSE PANEL**

MBDA Acting National Director Garcia leads Trump Administration appointees in discussion on education, policy and minority-owned businesses

WASHINGTON (February 23, 2018) — The Department of Commerce’s Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) celebrated diversity in business and African-American contributions to the growing U.S. economy today.

The 2018 African American Heritage Month event featured remarks from U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross, and a panel discussion highlighting the Trump Administration’s priorities in education and policy.

“When African Americans thrive, all of America thrives,” Secretary Ross said. “Here at the Commerce Department, we are here to support you, and to help you prosper.”

Following Secretary Ross’ address, MBDA Acting National Director Chris Garcia led a fireside chat featuring Ja’Ron Smith, Special Assistant to the President of the United States for Domestic Policy, and Johnathan Holifield, the Executive Director of the White House Initiative on HBCUs.

The panel discussion – “African American Leaders in the White House: Education, Business and Policy” – addressed issues facing minority business enterprises and acknowledged the crucial role African American businesses play in keeping the U.S. competitive.

Smith has two Howard University degrees, and previously served as a Congressional staff member before taking over as Director of External Affairs for Generation Opportunity, an advocacy group aimed at engaging young Americans on economic policy issues.

Holifield, who holds a master’s degree in education and a law degree from the University of Cincinnati, was a consultant, author and speaker before his appointment to the Trump Administration. A former West Virginia and Cincinnati Bengals running back, Holifield was a co-founder in a consulting firm, ScaleUp Partners, that worked with businesses, colleges and universities.

MBDA is the only federal agency solely dedicated to the growth and sustainability of minority-owned firms, helping to secure an annual average of \$5.4 billion worth of contracts and financial investments.



About the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA)

MBDA, www.mbda.gov, is the only Federal agency dedicated to the growth and global competitiveness of U.S. minority-owned businesses. Our programs and services better equip minority-owned firms to create jobs, build scale and capacity, increase revenues and expand regionally, nationally and internationally. Services are provided through a network of MBDA Business Centers. After 45 years of service, MBDA continues to be a dedicated strategic partner to all U.S. minority-owned businesses, committed to providing programs and services that build size, scale and capacity through access to capital, contracts and markets. Follow us on Twitter [@usmbda](https://twitter.com/usmbda).

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