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



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U.S. Commerce Department Agencies Host CEO Fireside Chat in Commemoration of African American History Month

WASHINGTON (February 26, 2014) — The U.S. Commerce Department’s Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA) and International Trade Administration (ITA) today co-hosted a CEO Fireside Chat in recognition of the significant contributions made by minority-owned firms to the U.S. economy. MBDA Acting National Director Alejandra Y. Castillo and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Domestic Operations Antwaun Griffin delivered remarks, followed by a panel discussion with business leaders during the event, which was also in commemoration of African American History Month.

In addition to highlighting MBDA and ITA’s commitment to helping minority entrepreneurs and business owners get access to capital, contracts, and other tools they need to succeed, the event promoted the accomplishments of distinguished African American CEOs. Sharon T. Freeman, Ph.D., president of the All American Small Business Exporters Association (AASBEA), moderated the discussion, which featured Ronald Hall, president and chief executive officer of Bridgewater Interiors; B. Doyle Mitchell, Jr., president and CEO of Industrial Bank, N.A.; and Marie Johns, founder and president of L&L Consulting LLC.

“This event was a launching pad for a collaborated outreach effort between MBDA and ITA that will promote the commercial benefits of trade and investment to the minority business community,” said Castillo. “The U.S. had its fourth straight year of record exports, with \$2.3 trillion in exports in 2013, up nearly \$700 billion since 2009. So, the importance of minority-owned businesses becoming a key component of U.S. international trade has never been greater.”

The primary objective of this collaboration and the event was to introduce more minority business enterprises to the broad range of programs and services available to assist them in accessing international markets through ITA’s Global Markets unit, as well as other federal government resources. Nearly 300 people, including in person and via live-stream, heard from the panelists about the importance of international commerce and how it directly impacts the growth and development of U.S. businesses, especially minority-owned firms.

“Minority-owned firms are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. export community,” said Griffin. “That is why the ITA and MBDA strategic partnership is so important. Both our bureaus have come together to help educate minority businesses on the numerous opportunities that are

available to assist them in exporting for the first time, and to help firms currently exporting to expand to new markets.”

Below is more information about the featured speakers:

Moderator: Sharon T. Freeman, Ph.D., is president of the All American Small Business Exporters Association (AASBEA). Dr. Freeman has worked in over 100 countries specializing in helping small, minority, women and immigrant-owned business connect, grow and thrive.

Ronald Hall is president and chief executive officer of Bridgewater Interiors, which was the 2013 National Minority Enterprise Development Week Manufacturer of the Year winner. Bridgewater Interiors is a joint venture between Epsilon Technologies and Johnson Controls.

B. Doyle Mitchell, Jr. is president and CEO of Industrial Bank, N.A., headquartered in Washington, DC. Industrial Bank is the oldest and largest African American owned commercial bank in the metropolitan Washington region.

Marie Johns is the founder and president L&L Consulting LLC, and has been a leader in business, community and government services for more than 30 years. Johns served as the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Deputy Administrator from June 2010 through June 2013.

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.

About the International Trade Administration

The International Trade Administration (ITA) is the premier resource for American companies competing in the global marketplace. ITA has 2,400 employees assisting U.S. exporters in more than 100 U.S. cities and 72 countries worldwide. For more information on ITA visit www.trade.gov.

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