

White House Conference on Small Business

With the U.S. economy continuing to struggle, now is the time for a White House Conference on Small Business.

There are an estimated 70 million people in the small-business community, each of whom plays an important role in the health of the U.S. economy. NSBA urges Congress to act quickly on legislation authorizing a White House Conference on Small Business (WHCSB), thus sending a message to the millions of people running, or working in a small business that their long-term economic security is a priority, not just campaign season rhetoric.

As we continue to turn the corner on the worst recession since the great depression, long-term economic growth and job creation remain a top priority for our country. Comprising over 99 percent of all U.S. employers, small businesses face challenges that continue to be a centerpiece in lawmakers' rhetoric. Those lawmakers, along with the administration are in a unique position to open their doors to the small-business community through a WHCSB.

Not since 1995 has an administration convened a WHCSB. NSBA is calling on Congress to authorize and appropriate funds for a WHCSB within the next two years. The minimal appropriations (\$5 million) used for the 1995 WHCSB led to overwhelming success in enacting legislation to better the environment for America's entrepreneurs. Of the 60 legislative and regulatory recommendations that were the product of the Conference, more than 90 percent were addressed in some way, and 20 of the 60 recommendations were enacted into law.

The WHCSB is an investment in small-business growth that will more than pay for itself by furthering an environment where small businesses can be launched and prosper.

The goal of the WHCSB is the development of a comprehensive action agenda to improve the economic environment in the U.S. for small business in the following months and years. Inherent to achieving this goal is the coordinated work of Congress through the Senate and House Small Business Committees, the administration through the U.S. Small Business Administration and the Office of Advocacy, and small-business advocacy groups. NSBA stands ready to work with each of these constituencies in both the execution of a WHCSB and the implementation of the action agenda's recommendations.

We should not take a positive small business environment for granted. The World Bank recently released its annual report "Doing Business 2012: Doing business in a more transparent world." In 2007, the U.S. ranked third in the "ease of starting a business" category. In 2012, the U.S. ranks 13th. The U.S. rank for "paying taxes" has dropped to 72nd place from 63rd out of 183. The cost of starting a business, measured as a percentage of per capita income, has doubled to 1.4 percent from 0.7 percent in 2007.

A critical piece to the success of the WHCSB is the utilization of state conferences to ensure broad and equitable representation of the very diverse small-business community. Through the state conferences, which feed into the regional conferences and then into the national conference, small-business owners are able to develop, enhance and fully embrace the key issues facing small businesses nationwide. In addition to building consensus, growing small-business networks and nurturing future small-business leaders, the state conferences and broad participation of small businesses lend credibility to the final list of recommendations. It also eliminates any concerns that any single constituent group or sponsoring party hand-picked delegates to such a conference.

NSBA strongly urges Congress to take-up legislation, similar to language offered in the 107th Congress by Sens. Kit Bond (R-Mo.) and John Kerry (D-Mass.) known as the *White House Quadrennial Small Business Summit Act of 2001* (S. 396). Such legislation needs to be acted upon in the near-term to ensure that small-business issues remain at the forefront during the difficult economic times we face, and also to ensure small business issues are a priority for years to come.

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