

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks on the Nomination of Maria Contreras-Sweet To Be Administrator of the Small Business Administration

January 15, 2014

Please have a seat. Thank you so much. Well, welcome to the White House. And I am pleased to be joined by many of the people on the frontlines when it comes to creating jobs and new opportunities: America's small-business owners. And I want to thank all of them for the hard work and the sacrifice of these entrepreneurs, as well as the workers and the families across the country that have helped us pull ourselves out of one of the worst recessions in our history.

Now what we're seeing is businesses having created more than 8 million new jobs since we hit bottom. Manufacturing is growing, led by a booming auto industry. Our investments have helped bring about new technologies, more affordable energy, and are slowing health care costs, all of which are making America even more attractive for investors. And we're starting to see a lot of the jobs that had left our shores in manufacturing, for example, starting to come back, because we put ourselves in a much more competitive position.

And so all the pieces are there to bring back even more new jobs to America this year, but it's not going to happen by itself. This has to be a year of action. We've got to keep our economy growing. We've got to make sure that our working families are sharing in growth and increasing success. We've got to make sure that we're creating more good jobs that pay good wages and provide families with some measure of security. We've got to make sure that the recovery doesn't leave anybody behind.

And that's where our small businesses can help lead the way, because small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy. They create most of the country's new jobs. They're cornerstones of our communities. And they're part of the pact that America makes: the idea that if you work hard, if you take responsibility, then you can build something new. You can make something of yourself. You can leave something behind for your children. And that's the dream that brought generations of hard-working immigrants to our shores, and that's the idea that drives small-business owners to create new products and expand their businesses every single day.

And that's one of the reasons why I made small business a priority from day one when I took this office. It's why we cut taxes for small-business owners not once, but twice—not once or twice, but 18 times in my first term. Small-business owners had a real tough time in the financial crisis. When lending froze, they were the ones who were getting hit the hardest. So my administration supported record amounts of lending to small businesses through the SBA: more than \$130 billion to more than 225,000 small businesses during the course of 5 years.

We made it easier for small business to compete for and win Federal contracts by eliminating unnecessary paperwork and cutting redtape and accelerating payments to small-business contractors through the QuickPay program so that they can maintain the cash flow that they need to grow their businesses and create more jobs. And so in my first term, nearly \$380 billion in Federal contracts went to small business. That's almost \$50 billion more than in the 4 years before I took office.

So I deeply believe in small businesses that can help to drive and continue the growth that we've already seen. And I elevated the role of the Small Business Administrator to Cabinet

level to give small businesses a seat at the table when we are talking about our economic agenda. I've searched for an exceptional person to serve as the next leader of the SBA. I wanted somebody with a proven track record of helping small businesses succeed, somebody who had firsthand experience both in the private sector and the public sector who can work with us and work with me to increase growth and expand opportunity. I wanted somebody who understands entrepreneurs, and it would be even better if that somebody had actually started a business of her own.

And that's why I'm so proud to nominate Maria Contreras-Sweet to be the next Administrator of the Small Business Administration.

Maria knows how hard it is to get started on a business—the grueling hours, the stress, the occasional self-doubt, although I have not yet seen self-doubt out of Maria. *[Laughter]*

She knows it herself. She's the founder of ProAmerica Bank, the first Latino-owned business bank in California in over 30 years. Its focus is small and medium-sized businesses in Latino neighborhoods. So not only did she start small businesses, but those have also been her customers, and she understands all too often that the lack of access to capital means a lack of opportunity.

As Secretary of the California Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency, Maria was the driving force behind major job creation and major public investments in infrastructure and in housing. As a consultant, she helped companies expand into the Latino market. She's a champion of women-owned and family-owned businesses. When she started her bank, she said she wanted the bank to be a place where families would come for help, "because when family businesses thrive"—and I'm quoting—"the community thrives and the economy thrives." And as someone who moved to California from Mexico as a young girl, and whose mother worked long hours to support Maria and her five siblings, she knows firsthand the challenges that working families and recent immigrants are facing.

So she understands the needs of small-business owners like herself. She knows how they can lift entire communities and ultimately how they lift our country. So as we work to keep our economy growing, Maria will be charged with looking for more ways to support small businesses: to help them get that good idea off the ground, to expand, to hire, to sell their products and ideas not only in our domestic markets, but also overseas. And I'm absolutely confident that she is going to do an outstanding job as our Small Business Administrator.

So I want to thank her for accepting this position and the challenge, and I know that she's going to be up to the task. And I want to thank her husband Ray and her three outstanding children because jobs like this turn out to be family affairs and I know that Ray is very supportive and is going to be a great partner with her in this task.

Now, Maria follows in the footsteps of two extraordinary leaders: Karen Mills, who served as Administrator of the SBA in my first term, and Jeanne Hulit, who has graciously agreed to serve as Acting Administrator after Karen stepped down last year. Together, they made it easier and faster for entrepreneurs to get loans, to win contracts, to hire more people, and the results are thriving small businesses across the country.

Some of those entrepreneurs are here today. Twenty years ago, Deb and Dan Carey wanted so bad to start their own brewing company that they sold their house to help pay for it. And with a little help from the SBA, they rented an old appliance factory, set up their equipment; they got to work. Today, the New Glarus Brewing Company is one of the top craft beer-makers in Wisconsin, with more than 80 full-time employees. So Deb and Dan, where are

you? You're around here somewhere. There they are, right there. *[Applause]* Good to see you again.

There's another success story here: the team behind Taylor Gourmet, a hoagie shop with locations all over DC, including one just half a block from the White House. *[Laughter]* If you're wondering why I know about this, the staff are steady customers at Taylor Gourmet, and I have tasted those tasty sandwiches. When Casey Patten and Dave Mazza moved to DC, they looked everywhere for hoagies like the ones they'd grown up with in Philly. And when they couldn't find any, they thought, we should make them ourselves. And with the help of the SBA, they opened eight shops in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. And so not only are they providing great sandwiches, but they're also creating jobs here in the area.

That's the power of small business. That's the charge of the SBA. That's the extraordinary work that Jeanne has done, and before her Karen, to help advance the agenda of people who just have a dream and are willing to put in all the blood, sweat, and tears that they need to do in order to achieve that dream. And so when we think about our small businesses, just remember that's what keeps our communities and our country strong, and we should be doing everything in our power to help them succeed. If, here in America, you're willing to work hard and dream big, you should have your shot at success.

Jeanne's understood that, and in fact, she's going to be going back into the private sector and helping small businesses back in Maine. I told her she might have wanted to stay here until the winter is over—*[laughter]*—but she's eager to get back, and she's already stayed longer than she originally intended.

And I know this is something that Maria understands. Maria, on the way in, told me a wonderful story about how her grandmother back in Mexico, who was a migrant worker, said to her that if she worked hard and studied, stayed in school, that someday she'd be able to work in an office as a secretary and really make her proud. And she ended up being the Secretary of Health and Human—or Business Development and Transportation in California. And now she's going to be helping the folks who are following behind her achieve their dreams. That's what America is all about.

So Maria is fulfilling the vision of her grandma in ways that maybe are not entirely expected. And I'm confident that she's going to put her heart and soul into making sure that all the other people who are out there striving and trying to achieve their dreams can succeed as well. That's what this administration is about, and I'm looking forward to working with her.

So thank you very much. Give them a big round of applause.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:46 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Rafael, Francesca, and Antonio Sweet, children, of Administrator-designate Contreras-Sweet; Deborah Carey, founder and president, and Dan Carey, co-owner and brewmaster, New Glarus Brewing Company; and Casey Patten and Dave Mazza, owners, Taylor Gourmet.

Categories: Appointments and Nominations : Small Business Administration Administrator, nomination, remarks.

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Subjects: Business and industry : Minority-owned businesses; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Economic impact; Business and industry : Small businesses :: Promotion efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Government organization and employees : Federal Government contracting policies, reform; Small Business Administration : Administrator; Small Business Administration : Loan guarantee facility.

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