State of the Economy

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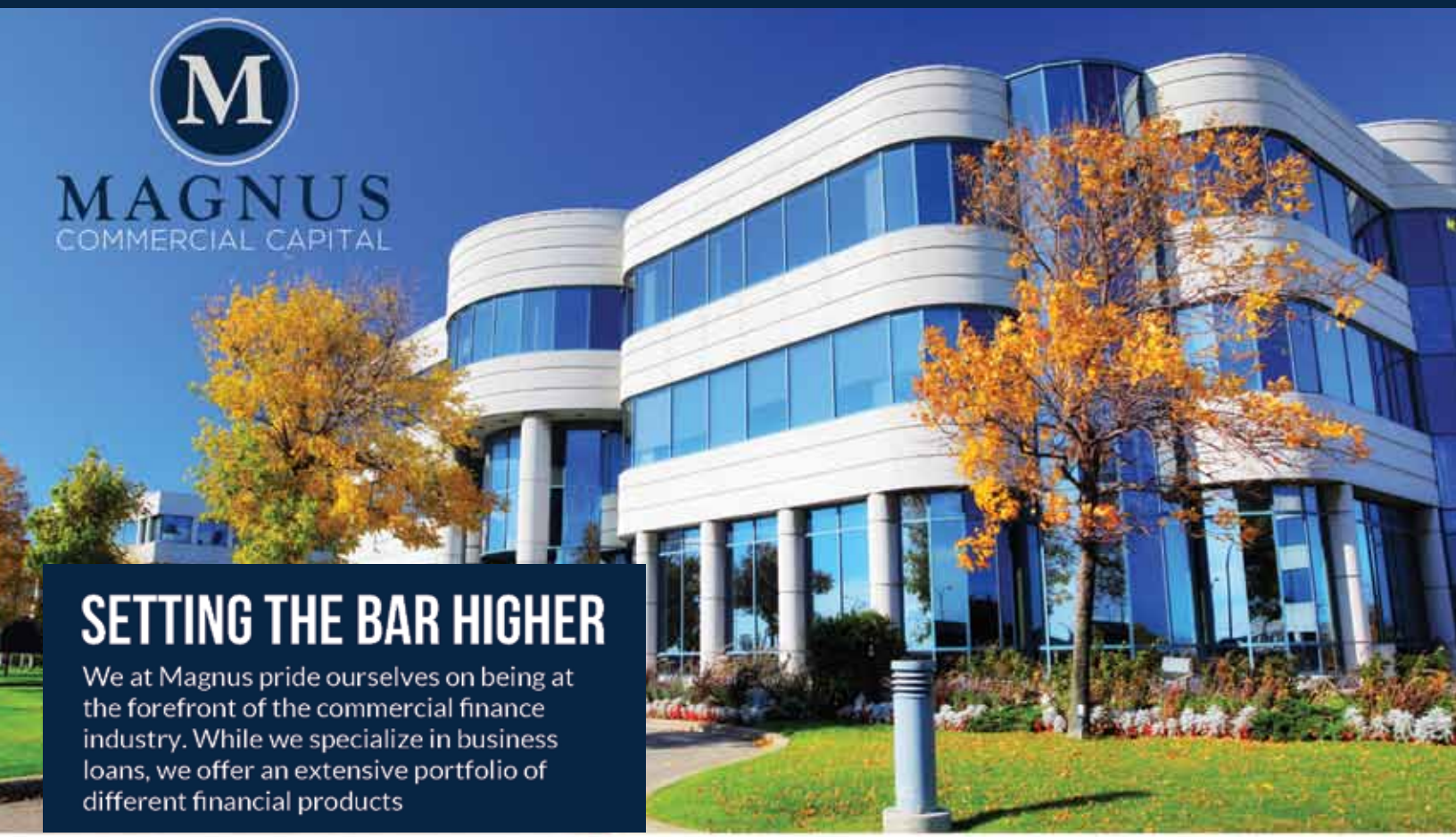
The Story of Opposites

- *Danaiya and Simon Woo of SimonComputing, Inc.*



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Simon and Danaiya Woo of SimonComputing, Inc.

Publisher's Message

MEA's new initiative US-Africa Business Council (USABC) hopes to bring the African and the American business community together.

The American way of doing business and the African way is very different. We plan to develop a program to balance these differences. Many times my partner and I have been to various African embassies where we had taken very prominent African American business people interested in selling their products to Africa. We had an excellent and receptive audience at the Embassy meetings, but there was no follow-up after very lengthy presentations, meeting after meeting from the Embassy officials. This is almost unbelievable in our business society. You could hardly get an email or phone call response. How do you determine the next step without a follow-up?

African Ambassadors should be more encouraged to work with black business leaders and create lasting relationships that will make us want to invest in Africa. Africans need to understanding that the black CEO is just as capable as the white CEO. Many Americans want to work in the motherland, but do not know the process for a successful venture. We have experienced strategists working with us to ensure just that.

Presidents of various countries in Africa are not familiar to us, but we readily recognize terrorists. There are several billionaires in Africa, but their faces are not familiar to us either. Their success stories are not being told in our publications. Why are we not aggressively promoting doing business with each other as we should? Why are they not advertising their products and services or promoting tourism in our publications? Tourism is a very significant economic resource that could benefit Africa by creating job opportunities and encouraging people to think about visiting or vacationing there. The media is definitely not being used to their advantage.

There is room for everyone to expand into the continent of Africa. But a lot of work needs to be done here. By the way visit the African Channel at www.theafricachannel.com.

Debra Williams,
Publisher

Three interesting business books to read: "*Black Business Secrets* – 500 Tips, Strategies and Resources for the African American Entrepreneur" by Dante Lee; "*Pay Yourself First* – The African American Guide to Financial Success and Security" by Jesse B. Brown; and *"The Money Coach Guide to Your First Million"* by Lynnette Khalfani.

"What could be more absurd and ridiculous than that one group of individuals who are trying to throw off the yolk of oppression themselves, so as to get relief from conditions which handicap and injure them, should favor laws and customs which impede the progress of another unfortunate group and hinder them in every conceivable way." – Mary Church Terrell

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State of the Economy

By Shelly M. Gross-Wade

Shelly M. Gross-Wade

The small business economy is poised to compete after a protracted six year economic recession in the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia (DMV) region and indeed the nation. Anecdotally, we've observed that many local, small and minority business owners have weathered the storm and still managed to hold on by their boot straps. Those that had a mindset to change their paradigm, expand their social network and diversify their customer base also saw the benefits of not having all of their proverbial eggs in one basket. Others took advantage of the economic slowdown to reposition their business through improved processes. Some explored and pursued new market opportunities to stabilize or expand their business. Several spent a significant amount of time cultivating relationships, forming joint ventures and evaluating the competition in order to seize the opportunity to compete locally, regionally and indeed globally. By all indications, many companies have refined their approaches, evaluated their business cycle and developed new and improved business models to further quantify their value proposition. All of these strategies have created an increased need for access to capital.

The recently appointed SBA Administrator, Maria Contreras-Sweet, stated that "*SBA lending to African-Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino-owned businesses, as well as women-owned businesses, can lift up entire communities*". The SBA, in an effort to make loans more accessible to these business owners, has further streamlined its eligibility requirements and standard operating procedures, to further encourage traditional and non-traditional lenders to be more innovative and creative in their lending practices. In addressing more than 600 SBA 504 lenders at our national conference held in Colorado Springs, she stated, "*SBA must reach more Main Street businesses seeking loans, and we can only do this by strengthening our partnerships with CDCs, community banks and micro lenders.*"

Traditional lenders have been extremely competitive and more risk tolerant than before the economic recession. While that is commendable, there are still significant, unmet financing needs for America's 28 million small business owners and entrepreneurs.

Non-bank lenders, like FSC First, are mission driven and typically have an economic or community development mission. As such we have the ability to be more flexible in the terms and conditions by which we extend a commitment to lend and may structure direct loans with creative terms and innovative conditions. As a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), FSC First is amongst the first CDFIs qualified to participate in the SBA Community Advantage program which provides 75-85% guarantees on direct loans made to eligible borrowers. SBA, in an effort to encourage local business owners to utilize the Community Advantage program, has waived the guarantee fee for any loan up to $150,000 that qualifies for the Community Advantage guarantee.

Recently, the FSC First Board of Directors and 12-member bank pool authorized FSC First to provide direct loans on a regional level to four new markets: Howard, Montgomery, Calvert and Charles Counties; as well as its primary market – Prince George's County. FSC First will collaborate with the economic development organizations in those counties to leverage their existing loan programs.

Achieve Relevant Milestones

Achieving access to non-traditional capital, to procurement or contracting opportunities and to new market opportunities requires the business owner to focus on the economic impact to be realized in the community in which their project is or will be located. Unlike traditional lending institutions, non-bank lenders and mission focus economic development organizations typically are expected to fulfill specific public policy goals. Therefore, the businesses funded by these public-private partnerships must demonstrate an ability to achieve relevant milestones. The milestones may include, but not be limited to: increased revenues and profits, job creation and retention, expansion or modernization of their facility, investment in capital improvements, exporting products and services; to name just a few.

A Conduit to Financing Your Business Dreams

Understanding a business's financing priorities is the touchstone to a lenders' ability to fulfill the business owner's needs. This is typically achieved through a holistic analysis of the business, a site visit and evaluation of the business's historical financial statements and tax returns and projected income and cash flow statements.

Likewise, the business owner needs to insure that the lender can make a favorable decision on the financing request within a reasonable timeframe. Regardless of whether the lender is a traditional (bank) or a non-bank lender, like FSC First, it is imperative that the loan package be complete and well organized. To enhance the review and analysis of the initial funding request, it is essential that the business owner present their business financing proposal in a thorough and comprehensive manner.

An incomplete loan package is a distraction to the lender as it does not allow the lender to fully comprehend the business owner's 1) character, 2) capacity to repay, 3) collateral – assets available to secure the loan, 4) conditions that will influence the rate and term of the loan, and 5) credit history of the borrower and guarantors.

A quality loan package is the conduit to obtain financing for your business dreams. Therefore, the following documents, at a minimum, should be provided to support the financing request:

1. SBA or Lender Provided:
   a. Loan Application Form
   b. Statement of Personal History
2. Business Owner Provided:
   a. Business Plan or detailed Executive Summary
   b. Marketing Strategy
   c. Exit Strategy
   d. Resumes of all management team members
   e. Cash Flow Projections (month-to-month), for 12-24 months
   f. Recent three years of historical Tax Returns (for the business)
   g. Recent three years of individual Tax Returns (for each guarantor or owner who holds 20% interest in the business)
   h. Recent three years of internally-prepared Financial Statements
3. Supporting Documents
   a. A copy of the owner's personal credit report (for preliminary review)
   b. A copy of the current lease
   c. A copy of any contract for sale (if any)
   d. A copy of the Work in Progress Report (if applicable)
   e. A copy of any negotiated economic or community development benefits (such as tax credits or grants from the local economic development organization, if applicable)
   f. Articles of Incorporation or Organization & ByLaws
   g. Certificate of Good Standing from the State Department of Assessment & Taxation

Incomplete loan packages forces the lender to take the loan package out of cue for credit analysis and underwriting and move on to the next borrower's request. Incomplete loan packages can also be very costly to the Lender and ultimately the borrower. The old adage that "time is money" is construed in two ways: 1) don't waste the lender's time by providing inadequate loan packages for formal review and consideration – you deserve a definitive answer to your funding request as soon as possible; and 2) don't waste the business owner's time by submitting an inadequate loan package because your business needs you to remain focused on the revenue generating activities of the company.

By providing the requested and required documentation at the beginning of the loan application process, the borrower enhances the lender's ability to make a qualified credit decision, render a commitment and move expeditiously to closing and funding the loan.

This article contains proven strategies for how to obtain a favorable outcome to your traditional or non-traditional business loan request. Should you desire assistance with your loan package, it is encouraged that you contact the local economic development organization, your neighborhood business innovation center, or the small & technology development centers. All of these organizations provide technical assistance (with no out-of-pocket cost) to support your thriving business venture. These resource partners are prepared to assist your business in obtaining a microloan (ranging from $5,000 to $35,000), a typical small business loan (ranging from $35,000 to $350,000), or a typical growth loan (ranging from $350,000 to $5.5 million or more).

The future looks bright for emerging growth companies. Access to capital is improved and no longer an evasive process as in years past. Now that you know how to access the traditional and non-traditional lender, the probability for loan approval is much greater. Seize the moment to contact your preferred Lender now to begin your process. Traditional lenders have many banking services to support your current needs and future growth; on the other hand non-traditional lenders, typically, have their finger on the economic pulse in your local community and have access to many incentives that could enhance your bottom line as well as access to local, regional and national policy and decision makers.

About the Author – Shelly M. Gross-Wade has served as the President & CEO of the Prince George's Financial Services Corporation (also known as FSC First) for more than 15 years. FSC First has assisted start-up, emerging growth and pre-bankable companies with access to capital using various federal, state, and local financing and incentive programs. As a non-bank lender, FSC First makes direct loans ranging from $5,000 to $5,000,000. FSC First provides innovative and creative financing solutions to businesses that meet certain eligibility criteria and have the ability to achieve certain economic impact milestones. FSC First is a statewide (Maryland) Certified Development Company authorized to market, underwrite, close and service the SBA 504 REAL Financing Program; ,and as a 501c(3), nonprofit, Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFI); serves as a fund manager to various state and local financing programs. FSC First can be accessed at www.fscfirst.com or (301) 883-6900.

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The 3 Legged Stool!

Business Financing in Today's Climate

By George Roby

So you're an entrepreneur looking to start or acquire a business, you may be looking for start-up capital. Or maybe you're a business owner wanting to grow or expand your operation, and will require working capital. You go to your bank and your bank turns you down, what's next?

The next part, is what this article will explore: How business financing is leveraged, the different sectors in obtaining financing, and most of all, how to get it.

How is business financing leveraged?

Business capital is provided in two ways, it can either be leveraged through debt or equity or a hybrid of both. The 3rd way is to use your own funds or borrow from family and friends.

The public or retail sector, has great programs for both start-ups and existing businesses. For those that qualify, your financing problems could be solved. For those that don't qualify for the retail programs, we are often forced to suck it up and make due, or resort to the last option of closing up shop. This is where having a relationship with a private or wholesale sector lending firm is most often viable and many times, the last line of defense.

What's the difference between public or private sectors for funding?

For starters, Public is also considered retail (indirect investor) and Private is considered wholesale (investor direct).

The public sector lending model is to often sell the paper and service the account. A large portion of their paper is sold to the secondary market. That may be investors in the Libor, Fannie Mae, FreddieMac in the residential market and these investors have certain criteria that they'll only buy. Any loan that does not meet the criteria, is deemed unsellable or labeled as non-qualified. If the retail sector cannot sell it, the deal is not likely to get done or it will be held to their own portfolio, which isn't ideal. That public retail model alone, does not welcome any dealings or transactions that may seem risky for those reasons.

For you, starting a Camel racing business may sound golden, for a bank or secondary market guidelines, it could be considered a high risk venture and deemed unlendable. For those loans that fit the secondary markets guidelines, the banks will approve and provide funds for. These loans are often pooled together in a portfolio to be sold to investors or leveraged against within a CMBS program (Commercial Mortgage Backed Securities). When it's said that the "banks don't want to lend," by all means, they want to lend you their money. However, their money is leveraged on the ability to sell to the secondary market and typically can only approve transactions that meet the secondary market guidelines.

As for the Private sector (wholesale), these companies are typically privately owned, no shareholders to please or stock price to monitor. The funds are often investor direct and paper is not predicated on the ability to sell it to the secondary market. With that, a plethora of nonconventional funding programs may be available that fits that investors scope, including your Camel racing venture. Private companies have the ability to look at every single transaction within it's own merit. Transaction A isn't compared to transaction B. One bad apple doesn't spoil the bunch.

From an underwriting standpoint, both the retail and wholesale sectors look at 3 main things, Cash, Collateral, and Credit. I like to refer to it as the "3 Legged Stool." In the public sector, if one of those legs are broken, it's not that your stool is wobbly, you don't have a stool to sit on at all or otherwise, an approved loan. In the private sector, only one leg is often required to leverage capital. Poor personal credit, they can leverage the collateral or assets; no collateral, they can leverage liquidity or personal credit rating and so on. The retail and wholesale sectors often

work together, it's never one or the other. Many, if not all of the retail and government programs available, wholesale entities also utilize and often funnel qualified transactions through those portals. Furthermore, the myth that wholesale programs carry a higher interest rate or cost of funds is most often not true, and some programs are not interest rate driven at all.

Before I finish up, I'd like to leave you with this. When it comes to acquiring business financing, I want you to think of horse racing. You have jockey and a horse. The jockey represents the business owner and the horse as the business. Professional horse racing gamblers study the jockey just as much as the horse. How long has the jockey been with the horse, how long in the industry, what is his body weight, what is his technique, is he consistent. Business capital is virtually the same way. If you have a weak jockey, you better have a strong horse. If you have a weak horse, you better have a strong jockey. If you have a weak jockey and a weak horse, you don't have a deal or a chance of winning that race. For obtaining business capital in today's climate, there is a method to the madness and we're here to help you through it all.

Article written by, George Roby

Managing Director with Magnus Commercial Capital. George Roby has 15 years in the financial arena holding positions as a Lending Manager with a National Bank and Director of Lending Operations in the Private Sector.

The Story of Opposites

Danaiya and Simon Woo, SimonComputing Inc.

By Phyllis Cunningham

It is often quoted that "opposites attract" and this is certainly the case for power couple, Danaiya and Simon Woo. They are as different as night and day—one is an extreme extrovert, the other a serious introvert. Danaiya Woo is President of SimonComputing Inc. Her outgoing and gregarious personality makes her the ideal partner to spearhead the company's business growth. "She's the life of the party and a great negotiator," says husband Simon. His personality, on the other hand, is more reserved and laid back. "Simon is content working behind the scenes, writing code for hours and handling all of the technical aspects of our company," confides Danaiya. As a couple, they appreciate and support the strengths they each bring to the table. Through open communication, they are able to look at all sides of an issue and come up with a balanced, objective solution, whether in family matters or in business.

As different as Simon and Danaiya are in personality and temperament, they have been happily married and have two wonderful children. Both are quick to admit that the key to their successful marriage and thriving business is this: they share common family values—their relationship is built on trust, honesty and communication. And these family values permeate everything they do, from raising two amazing children to growing a strong business team and successful IT company.

Danaiya, because of her upbringing and financial background wanted to own her own business. Her father had been a successful entrepreneur and she witnesses firsthand the secrets of running a business. However, Simon had a different experience and the two of them began to explore various business opportunities that would be congruent with their family values. During that time of raising their children, being present as parents and working 40 hours week, Simon had the opportunity to observe the business practices of various IT company's. It became increasingly clear to him that hiring and training people is a very expensive process. He says, "The way to succeed in business is to hire the very best people and do what you can to treat them well and retain them." Combining Danaiya's interpersonal skills and financial acuity with his

SimonComputing
Software Development Simplified

Danaiya Woo, *President*, SimonComputing, Inc.

technical expertise in writing code and building software, SimonComputing, Inc., was launched in 2002.

Today, SimonComputing, Inc. is a first class, woman-owned, IT consulting services company specializing in software development—building biometrics and special devices into applications including cameras, 10 print fingerprint scanners, e-Passport readers, and RFID. SimonComputing has been appraised at Maturity Level 2 of the Capability Maturity Model Integration for Development; Version 1.3 (CMMI-DEV, V1.3) by a Software Engineering Institute (SEI) authorized Lead Appraiser. The company is also a certified 8(a) STARS II GWAC contract holder. This program aims to promote the use of small businesses for information technology (IT) services or IT services-based solutions for the federal government. This contract vehicle is designed exclusively for qualifying certified 8(a) small businesses specialized in information technology.

As a values based company, SimonComputing Inc. defines success around a few basic goals: 1) Do what's right for the client (build great software!); 2) Hire and retain the best people and, 3) Keep everything we do clear, concise and simple. In her role as company president, Danaiya is responsible for all non-technical aspects of the business including finance, marketing and operations. Simon's primary role, as executive vice president, is to drive how software is built, manage the majority of hiring skilled technical people and mentor software developers and interns.

Committed to simplifying the process of building, using, and maintaining software, the firm is recognized for successfully designing and implementing challenging Java/J2EE-based applications. Its values-based approach to software development has proven to increase reliability, usability, and maintainability of its software, and its Agile methodologies maintain high engagement with the client and ensures they are happy with the software that is built for them.

SimonComputing's impressive client list includes government agencies such as, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and U. S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), where SimonComputing has successfully delivered new and modernized software systems year after year. Their largest client is CBP. One of the most visible projects the company has worked on is modernizing CBP's entry process. SimonComputing technical staff designed and built major components of the modernized inspection systems used to process travelers at every air, land and sea port of entry. This included user interfaces, biometric capture components and supporting servers.

From Simon's perspective,when projects fail, especially large projects, they fail due to social and cultural issues on the projects. Large projects are more susceptible because the stakes are higher. "It is important to create an environment that is free of politics. If you can get the team operating on values and keep the workplace focused on the best ways to get the job done, you are much more likely to succeed," says Simon. In order to create such a productive workplace it is important to:

- Base decisions on technical merit. The further you get away from technical merit the harder it is to succeed.
- Focus on building things right and delivering quality to the client.
- Hire qualified people with a great work ethic.
- Create a working environment that encourages collaboration.
- Orchestrate the building of high performing teams and establish a defined process for training people effectively.

Simon and Danaiya agree that, "From a business perspective, our values are intended to unify a diverse and talented team. This ensures the building of strong relationships within the company as well as outside the company. Our success depends on the goodwill of our clients and the people that form the foundation of our company." Both Danaiya and Simon believe that creating high performing teams in essential to delivering a quality product to their clients and ensuring the longevity of their company. "What makes a business a great place to work is about creating a lifestyle for employees that make them want to stay" says Simon. Danaiya says, "It's not just about running a business. We feel that our employees are members of our extended family and we treat them that way." Her best advice to start-up entrepreneurs is to, "First and foremost have a passion for the work you do. Most importantly, always strive to create a healthy balance between family and work, celebrate the strengths and talents that each person brings to the whole and enjoy the journey of building a successful business." Moreover, says Simon, "It takes exceptional communication skills to articulate a clients vision into code. Make sure you hire the very best talent. If you're going to do something well, it is vitally important to specialize— this will set your team apart as the go-to experts in your field. Focus on your core product and always deliver quality to your clients."

Danaiya and Simon are not only successful entrepreneurs. They are also exceptional parents. And, as the saying goes, the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree—they have raised two exceptional kids. Their daughter, Ansa, is a third year student at Indiana University in Bloomington and their son, Justin, was recently accepted at several top universities including Virginia Tech, Penn State and the University of Florida.

While it may be true that this dynamic couple epitomizes "the story of opposites," by staying true to their shared family values, Danaiya and Simon Woo have amazingly combined their interpersonal skills, talents and professional expertise to grow SimonComputing Inc. into a tremendously successful business enterprise.

SimonComputing is based in Northern Virginia. For more information, please visit their website at www.simoncomputing.com or telephone (703) 914-5454.

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Joint Ventures: Win More, With More

By Jerry Alfonso Miles, Esq.

Jerry Alfonso Miles, Esq.

Competition is fierce in the federal marketplace and joint ventures may be a way for your company to add capabilities to its approach to winning federal contracts. Generally, joint ventures are a type of teaming arrangement that involves two or more companies forming a company to pursue federal contracts. Unlike more common forms of teaming (where one team member serves as a subcontractor to a prime contractor), joint ventures hold a prime contract directly with the federal government vis-à-vis the joint venture entity itself. If done correctly, joint ventures involve a consolidation of financial, management, and technical capabilities into a single, unified corporate approach that can boost your company's win rates.

Joint ventures can also be populated or unpopulated. A populated joint venture has its own employees and systems so that it can operate independently of the parent company venturers. An unpopulated joint venture, often referred to as a "shell entity" does not have its own employees or systems; so it may rely on those of its parent company venturers whether by virtue of subcontracting relationships or as otherwise allowed by a specific request for proposal.

Joint ventures do not come without significant risk and responsibilities. If a prime-subcontractor relationship is equivalent to a marriage between business partners, then some may agree that a joint venture relationship involves a business relationship progression where those two parent venturers have come together to have a child (that is, to form a new joint venture company). For this reason, companies should have prior experience working with a prospective joint venture partner before even considering discussion of whether to pursue a contracting opportunity as a joint venture. Ironically, however, joint venture contracting may provide more control, direct client contact and work share to a company that a traditional prime-subcontracting relationship ever could.

Joint ventures are also subject to regulation by the Small Business Administration ("SBA"). Two of these regulations involve restrictions on affiliation and the number of contract awards a joint venture can win. First, joint venturers cannot bid on government contracts where the parent companies, when added together, exceed the size standard set for the procurement by revenue or employees. Second, a single joint venture cannot win more than three contract awards over the course of a two year period. That said, the parent company venturers can create more than one joint venture to pursue contracts in order to account for any affiliation concerns by the SBA which is just one of several strategies for using joint ventures to win federal contracts.

By allowing two or more companies to form another company, a joint venture can allow those companies to combine their best attributes via the joint venture to enhance their competitiveness. In many cases, joint ventures may be necessary where a request for proposal requires a prime contractor to have all of the past performance and, in other cases, the past performance of a joint venture may be attributable to the parents for future contracting opportunities. But, for the most part, joint ventures are excellent vehicles for allowing companies to pursue set-aside and particularly large opportunities that they may not have been able to pursue without a joint venture.

Jerry Alfonso Miles, Esq., is the founder of Deale Services, LLC, an alternatively-priced government contracts law firm and consultancy located in Rockville, Maryland. Mr. Miles regularly advice clients on joint ventures, teaming agreements, subcontracts, contract management, regulatory compliance, mergers and acquisitions, bid protests and litigation. His law firm also provides corporate and employment legal services. For more information, he can be reached at jmiles@dealeservices.com


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You Call That News?!

By Ron Busby, Sr., *President*, U.S. Black Chambers, Inc.

A recent Wall Street Journal (WSJ) business report detailed the inability of Black-owned businesses to be approved for SBA-backed loans made through America's most prolific small business lenders. And while it was satisfying - in a weird kind of way - to have confirmed what Black business owners have known for years, it was however something of a gut punch to learn just how bad the situation has become.

As you might imagine, there are several reasons this latest report is so disturbing: the economy overall is "rebounding" - at least according to the WSJ report of March 14; **as a function of the rebound, SBA lending spiked to $30.29 BILLION in the most recent fiscal year; that Black-owned businesses were approved for 2.3% (1,242!) of the 54,000 SBA-backed loans last year pales in significance only to the further horror that those loans represented a p-a-l-t-r-y ONE POINT SEVEN PERCENT of the dollar value of those loans - $325 million.**

So get this straight: While the economy is (relatively) booming and the number of Black-owned businesses is skyrocketing (now about 7% of the total number of US businesses), **federally backed loans to support the growth and development of these businesses is not just shrinking, it's practically disappearing.** Shameful is one way to put it...

...a challenge worthy of a solution is the way we see it! Since the market crisis that saw the average credit score of Black borrowers plummet, and the average size of business loans surpass a million dollars, we also saw: Congress enact the Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (Dodd-Frank), **USBC forge a relationship with the National Bankers Association that resulted in $5 million being deposited into Black-owned financial institutions,** and - most recently - Maria Contreras-Sweet confirmed as the new Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

We believe that Administrator Contreras-Sweet - who founded ProAmerica Bank in Los Angeles - **"gets it."** Our conversations with her lead us to believe that the shrinking numbers of loans to African American businesses troubles her, too, and that she will immediately go to work to make improvements. During her recent confirmation speech, Administrator Contreras-Sweet declared that one of her top priorities would be to ensure that sufficient **funding would be granted to the hardworking minority businesses that need it the most.** We support utilizing innovative, non-traditional avenues of lending money to minority firms to guarantee success. Continuing the same-old strategies of asking banks to lend to Black firms and expecting a different outcome is insanity!

Among our recommendations to her is enforcement of Section 342 of the Dodd-Frank Act. This piece of the Wall Street Reform Act - authored by California Congresswoman Maxine Waters - contains little used (and more rarely enforced) provisions governing the activities of financial institutions AND the federal agencies that oversee their operations. If enforced, Section 342 would fit the description "Community

(L to R: Sach Takayasu, President, Asian/Pacific Islander American Chamber of Commerce & Entrepreneurship (ACE), SBA Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet, Ron Busby, President, U.S. Black Chambers, Inc. (USBC), Javier Palomarez, President, U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (USHCC))

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U.S. Secretary of Commerce Pritzker Announces New York City Native to Lead Minority Business Development Agency

Alejandra Y. Castillo

For Immediate Release
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WASHINGTON (April 17, 2014) — The U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker today announced the appointment of Alejandra Y. Castillo, a New York City native born to Dominican immigrants, with more than 20 years of experience working in the private, government and non-profit sector, as the new Director of the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA).

"The success of minority-owned businesses is fundamentally essential to our nation's economic vitality," said Pritzker. "MBDA has been instrumental in laying the foundation that is giving rise to the fastest growing segment of the business community, and I am very confident that Alejandra will continue to maximize their opportunities."

Castillo, a practicing attorney for several years, is the first Hispanic-American woman to lead the Agency, and only the second woman in MBDA's 45-year history. Previously, Castillo served as MBDA's National Deputy Director managing the Agency's day-to-day operations and its national network of more than 44 business centers across the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

"I am honored to accept this appointment as National Director of the Minority Business Development Agency," said Castillo. "As the daughter of a Dominican business-owner, I have come to see first-hand the transformative role minority-owned firms play in their communities and the contribution they make to the Nation's economy. As National Director, I am committed to carrying out Secretary Pritzker's "Open for Business Agenda" to assist minority entrepreneurs grow their businesses in size and scale while continuing to generate job and wealth creation for all Americans" said Castillo.

During FY13, MBDA assisted minority-owned businesses in obtaining more than $4.8 billion in capital and contract awards, which led to the creation and/or retention of 25,704 jobs, the highest performance level in the Agency's 45-year history.

Alejandra Y. Castillo Bio:

Ms. Castillo first joined the Department of Commerce in 2008 as a Special Advisor to the Under Secretary for the U. S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration (ITA). In this capacity, she was responsible for business outreach and intergovernmental affairs, as well as assisting in the development of policy initiatives geared at trade promotion and enforcement of U.S. trade laws.

A practicing attorney for several years, Ms. Castillo has worked in the private, government and non-profit sector. Prior to joining the Obama Administration, Ms. Castillo served as the Executive Director of the Hispanic National Bar Association headquartered (HNBA) in Washington D. C. During her tenure at HNBA, she was instrumental in working with the White House, and non-profit organization, such as the Latinos for a Fair Judiciary, in support of the nomination and confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Ms. Castillo served as a member of the Clinton Administration as a Senior Policy Analyst to the Deputy Director at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, and was responsible for developing and analyzing White House initiatives on anti-drug traffic and interdiction, anti-money laundering policies, as well as drug prevention and treatment programs.

A native of New York, Ms. Castillo holds a Bachelor Degree of Arts from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in economics and political science. Ms. Castillo holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy from the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas

at Austin; and also holds a Juris Doctorate Degree from American University - Washington College of Law. Ms. Castillo is active in a number of civic and professional organizations, including: The Hispanic National Bar Association, the Hispanic Bar Association of DC, the American Bar Association, and the American Jewish Committee. She also serves as a Board of Trustee of the University of the District of Columbia.. In 2010, Hispanic Business Magazine recognized Ms. Castillo among the Top 100 Influential Latino in the U.S. and she received the 2010 Rising Star Award by the Hispanic Bar Association of the District of Columbia.

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

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(L to R: Ron Busby, President/CEO, USBC; Marion Burns, Chairman, Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce (BCBCC), Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling, Larry Holman, President, BCBCC)

Reinvestment Act On Steroids." In a nutshell, if a bank's hiring practices, procurement policies and lending performance don't demonstrate their commitment to a level playing field, (at least on paper) that bank can't -- or shouldn't be allowed to -- borrow money from the Federal Reserve.

If a bank can't borrow money cheaply, it can't lend money at a profit. If a bank doesn't make a profit it's either declared insolvent and goes out of business, or it's bought by another, bigger bank. Unfortunately, it seems some banks would rather face the prospect of insolvency or takeover than lend money to a Black-owned business!

One bright spot that we are working furiously to replicate is the success of the USBC member chamber in Beaufort, SC. **Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce (BCBCC) President, Larry Holman, and his team underwent the rigorous training to become a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) and have actually begun to make loans to business owners.** We believe there is a near term opportunity to capitalize on the South Carolina CDFI success story and improve access to capital for Black owned businesses. Who knows? Maybe the U.S. Black Chambers, Inc. will solve the riddle of access to capital for Black businesses!

Now that would be real news!

Business Cards: A Fundraising Prospecting Tool

By Mel and Pearl Shaw

Mel and Pearl Shaw

Nonprofit CEOs, board chairs, and college presidents are constantly out and about meeting people and picking up business cards. Here's what we know: you can use those cards to stack the deck in favor of your fundraising success. Business cards also hold the key to strengthening your relationship with your development director or vice president for advancement. Our recommendation is tried and true: collect the cards, when you have a moment at the end of the day write short notes about each of your meetings. Send the notes and a photo of the cards back to your staff when you are on the road. Or submit them when back in the office. This gets the names, contact information, and notes about relationships and opportunities into your database. Next step: partnering with your development person.

Call a debriefing session with your development director or vice president. Review each of the business cards you collected. Share with her the key insights you learned from each of your meetings. Working together, prioritize next steps for how to engage each person you met. Some follow up items are simple: sending a report or web resource you discussed; making an introduction; ensuring an invitation to upcoming events is sent. Others are more complex. Perhaps one of the people you met with could assist in evaluating a partnership you want to pursue. Maybe you met a corporate manager who wants to engage her employees in a day of service at your nonprofit. Determine who is responsible for taking the relationship to the next level and by when. Set check-in and follow-up dates with each other and keep them.

This practice gives you a "door opener" for regularly meeting with your development person, a way to be actively engaged with her in developing new relationships and partnerships. You are sharing contacts and information with her – "bringing something to the table" instead of always asking her how much money she has raised. You are increasing the prospects you both can work with, sharing some details of your work, and creating an opportunity for the two of you to strategize together. This process can be a stimulus for new ideas and perspectives. You can work shoulder to shoulder, learning from each other, co-creating goals and opportunities, and making commitments to each other regarding how to follow up with and engage the people you have met. It can energize you, expand your mind-set and help build a culture of fundraising.

Critical to this process is one of our favorite activities: follow up. Once you begin this process it will be important to continue to stay connected and follow up with your development team and the people you have met. There are too many things that can take priority over follow up, and though you may be well meaning, you could find yourself face-to-face with someone you met several months ago and never followed up with. Set aside at

least an hour a week to focus on staying connected with people you've met and your development team. Set expectations for yourself and your team: weekly reporting on "touches" that have been taken to advance or grow high potential relationships. There's no reason to "over follow-up" – just make sure to stay in touch in an appropriate way.

Business people know the power of business cards: the same is true for nonprofits. Successful nonprofit leaders look to develop partnerships that bring value to all parties. They look for a win-win, not a "give me." Win-win looks at what you can offer to a partner, as well as what a donor, funder or business can bring to your nonprofit. As you follow up, think creatively about what your nonprofit has to offer and lead with what you can give, rather than what you want to receive. Fundraising success requires forethought and follow through. Business cards are one way to put these to practice.

Here are two truths about business cards and fundraising: a card can't open a door if it's sitting in a pile on your desk. Your development person can't turn a pile of cards into relationships. The two of you need to work together, be creative, and follow up.

Mel and Pearl Shaw position nonprofits, colleges and universities for fundraising success. For help with your campaign visit www.saadandshaw.com or call (901) 522-8727.

Unscrambling Africa: Unearthing the Gem

By Omolola Adekeye

Omolola Adekeye

History tells of the European conquests that eventually led to the scramble for Africa, the colonization of various nation states and then decolonization politically as it were. One of the major challenges of colonization is the pseudo personality which the nation states took on when it came to political, economic and social issues. For the most part, these states held on to their customs and traditions while desperately trying to make sense of what the colonialists taught them. They modeled their governments, trade agreements and international treaties from what was handed down to them as the "proper" way of living. They tried to dress, speak and live like their "colonial masters" infused with their age old traditions and customs. The marriage was a disaster effects of which are still seen in the very fiber of the African nation states today.

African leaders such as Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Modibo Keita of Mali, Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt, Sekou Touré of Guinea, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Ben Bella of Algeria, Emperor Haile Selasse of Ethiopia, William Tubman of Liberia, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya. Recognizing the incapacity of Africa in the global market place and driven by the noble intentions of Pan African Movement, formed the Organization of African Unity which became the African Union in 2002. Stemming from this organization where the sub-regional organizations like Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) also emerged in an effort to prepare Africa and its relatively young nation states for the uphill task of finding a voice within the global economic market. In its resilience, Africa lives despite the civil wars, military and civilian regimes, genocides, apartheid among the nation states. The people are happy, simple and hard working.

In a world facing hunger, constant technological advancement, and an exponential growth in population Africa is once again in the center stage. Its resources on the land and deep within its earth and waters are sending its neighbors to its doors again joined now by East European and Asian players. Undoubtedly, business in Africa brings a ton of opportunities in its stead. Within the past thirty years, there have been new discoveries in major sectors such as oil and gas, metals and minerals, banking, mobile technology and tourism. The Economist reports Africa as being the fastest growing economic force. In 2012 Goldman Sachs report, Africa's Turn showcased the opportunities of growth especially for businesses within the consumer sector. Africa's middle class is expected to exceed 100 million by 2030. Extensive investment potentials lie in the areas of Power, Finance, Agriculture and Transportation.

The scramble for Africa's natural resources interplays with the developing economies of the countries within Africa without caution for the most part. According to Goldman Sachs, Africa is responsible for 11 percent of the world's fuel and mining exports. Nigeria, Angola and Gabon are major producers of oil, Tanzania and Mozambique are gearing up to be major producers of liquefied natural gas (LNG) while Algeria is currently an important gas supplier to Europe through the Medgaz pipeline in Spain. Ghana, Niger and Guinea are discovering oil reserves. The copper cathode industry is dominated by Zambia and Morocco while Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa dominate the nickel trade. Despite this apparent economic growth, majority of these transactions are concluded amidst a lot of disorganization, chaos, political instability and insecurity. In most African countries the legal systems are not advanced even though they tend to mirror those of the colonial masters at the time of independence which for

most countries is now about 50 years ago. A lot of regulations that govern natural resources and trade were not written to benefit the growth and development of these nations but more so the imperialist who were trying to safeguard their economic

investments with clandestine methods. Meanwhile, the legal systems of countries seeking to invest continues to undergo changes as their societies develop.

Potential investors in Africa come to Africa with the notion that international trade and security regulations should operate but they are faced with a different almost herculean task. The realization that many of these accepted modes of conducting business may be acceptable on paper but do not determine the success of the transactions. An Ernest and Young report, Doing Business in Africa from strategy to execution, recognized the fact that doing business in Africa is complex but rewarding for those who are not fainthearted but eager and willing to learn about the continent, its diverse peoples and culture before embarking on the business of making financial gains. The report identified five factors to successfully doing business in Africa. These are: (1) Perspective (2) Planning (3) Places (4) Partnerships (5) People.

Though it is not possible to recommend a strait jacket approach to benefiting from the immense opportunities in Africa, it is clear that with a sense of balance and a deep regard and respect for the peoples and their traditions it is possible to establish frameworks that can be profitable and sustainable. The keen sense of balance guides the investors, define their perspective for doing business, and plan strategically as well as providing a platform that will make the venture economically and socially viable to the people of the communities where the resource sought is located. When the people are not adequately provided for there is outrage which results in kidnapping of foreign nationals amongst other things. This can increase the risk of investment. A deep regard for the people coupled with respect for their local business customs provides investors with the opportunities to foster partnerships and develop relationships that will serve to protect their investments in the long run. Identifying small and medium size businesses to work with in this regard cannot be overrated because these businesses are the driving force of the economies. South African based Rand Merchant Bank (RMB) in its 2013/14 Where to Invest in Africa report summed up succinctly the considerations for investing in sub-Saharan Africa. "Understanding the various challenges of doing business in sub-Saharan Africa, together with correctly assessing investment opportunities from the outset, can greatly enhance the likelihood of success and enable investors to better manage their processes so as to capitalize on the wealth of opportunities offered by the continent," says the report. Certain strategies need to be adopted to break the cycle or at least make it more manageable for investors and local businesses to do business together. Investors, African countries and businesses need to look to consulting firms and organizations that specialize in providing the global diversity training and partnerships necessary to do business in Africa.

The US - Africa Business Council (www.usafricabc.com) offers a constructive environment for research and development, partnership and relationship building as well as communication and cultural integration. To the investors the US-Africa Business Council will serve as a flagship into the African continent especially in the areas of finance, manufacturing, agriculture, transportation, technology and cultural awareness. Providing a consultants and strategic partners to assist in perspective and planning stages of prospecting as well as a forum for meeting with identified established small and medium sized companies as well as officials of governments. To African companies and governments seeking investors and credible partners, the council will guide the process, by providing adequate training opportunities with established consultants and firms well versed in the legal and business issues.

Omolola Adekeye is a human rights activist and an expert in international law. She is doing business and residing in Atlanta, Georgia. She can be reached at (404) 474-2131 or oadekeye@emaaint.com.

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U.S. Courthouse - Los Angeles

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Agenda

- Introductions
- Project Overview
- Project Small Business Goals
- Potential Subcontractor Opportunities
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See attached Directions and Parking Information.

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May 13, 2014
8:30 AM - Registration
9:30 AM - Presentation
11:00 AM - Networking
12:00 PM - Conclusion

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Europe: Misplace Optimism

By Walid Petiri

Walid Petiri

Is Europe finally looking up? Not much. While the continent has posted improvements, they are weak. Stock market rallies in Europe are based on little other than excessive hope. The MSCI stock index of nations in Europe's monetary union is up 2.3% this year, better than in the U.S.

Worrisome signs exist that deflation in Europe may become real. In the 18-nation group that uses the euro, January inflation dipped to just 0.7%, a dismally low reading that hampers the ability of interest rate policy makers to spur economic growth. And then there's the European Central Bank's inaction in the face of this threat: It has not lowered short-term rates further or embarked on large-scale bond buying, as the U.S. Federal Reserve did. That rekindled fears that, once again, European bureaucrats are compromising global stability by doing nothing.

Muddling the picture is that the latest readings of European gross domestic product paint a picture of recovery that is not consistent with impending deflation. GDP rose 0.3% in 2013's final quarter, beating analysts' expectations of 0.1%. That is tepid growth, but at least it is moving upward.

With the installation of Janet Yellen as the new and first female to chair the Federal Reserve, most of Wall Street and the global investment community are pleased. Thanks to the Fed's stimulus, there is indeed reason for optimism on this side of the Atlantic. The U.S. recently revised fourth quarter GDP growth to 3.2% and projects 3% for 2014, which seem to concur with the Fed move to gradually wind down its bond-buying program.

Meanwhile, the 18-member euro zone, the world's largest marketplace, projected its recent depression-level GDP to finally return to growing, after two years of contraction. In late February, Olli Rehn, the European Union's commissioner for economics and monetary affairs, forecast growth of 1.2% for 2014 and 1.8% in 2015. While most economists agree that the EU will have a positive, albeit sluggish, growth for 2014, other forecasts for specific countries are not very optimistic.

Spain, a country of nearly 47 million people with an overall unemployment rate of 27%, and youth joblessness (ages 16-24) at 57%, might see better days ahead. That is a big if. The European Union increased its forecast for Spanish 2014 economic growth to 1% from 0.5%. While technically this would affirm the end of the Spanish recession, this paltry level of growth along with continuing austerity policies is likely to continue if not see an increase in domestic unrest. That is not a good environment.

Worse for the European Union: If this is the outlook for its fifth largest economy (Spain is No. 13 in the world, according to the CIA's World Factbook) one wonders how likely it will be for the EU to meet its growth targets.

Many economists expect France's GDP to grow slightly at less than 1% for 2014, and that French unemployment will be slightly higher than initially expected and should be 11.2% for this year. If these forecast for Europe's' second largest economy (No. 5 in the world) pan out, they are going to place significant doubt amongst European Union leaders, on French President Francois Hollande's ability to guide France to a robust recovery.

If France and Spain are still wobbling, how strong can a recovery in Europe be? "The forecasts are particularly damning for France and will significantly increase pressure on Hollande at a time the president is already vulnerable," said Mujtaba Rahman, the director for Europe of the Eurasia Group consulting firm.

Thus in comparison Italy seen as emerging from its two-year recession with expected positive 2014 GDP growth of 0.5%. Relatively speaking, this looks favorable, in light of where Italy was recently. Recall the riots and violence in Italy in 2012 as its government instituted austerity plans. While things have calmed down quite a bit, unemployment is still high, with its government statistics agency forecasting an expected rise to 12.4% for this year, from 12.1% in 2013.

This persistent unemployment remains despite a return to growth, supported by exports, which are projected to gain further momentum in the next two years as foreign demand accelerates. Italian unemployment is set to remain high as the impact of rising demand for goods and services is likely to initially increase average working hours of persons already employed. (Sounds just like the U.S.)

So while none of these reports even remotely resembles strong growing economies of either a nation or European Union as a whole, we must put it in context. Just a couple years ago, many speculated that the EU would expel some countries because of their budget deficits and other weaknesses.

Worries stirred that the common currency and the EU itself might dissolve. Would the recessions in Spain and Italy, with austerity as a remedy, lead to political instability, anarchy or civil war? But none of these extreme circumstances occurred (yet) and the euro, while taking its knocks, stopped falling in value.

Europe is still not in the clear. With inflation expected to stay below 1% – the euro zone's 2014 target is 2% – deflation is a very real possibility during the second half of this year. Unlike the Bank of Japan, Britain's Bank of England or the U.S.'s Federal Reserve. There's opposition in Europe to the European Central Bank's buying government bonds to stimulate the economy, a problem that its counterparts in the U.S., U.K. and Japan do not have.

ECB rules forbid it from financing governments. To maneuver around those restrictions, the ECB would likely buy bonds across all euro zone countries from Germany to Spain to tiny Estonia. That way it would not prop up any one country yet seeks to buoy them all. The program's future, though, is uncertain just like the predictions of a stable 2014 EU recovery.

Walid Petiri, AAMS, RFC, Financial Management Strategies, LLC, www.fmsadvisors.com, 410-779-1276.

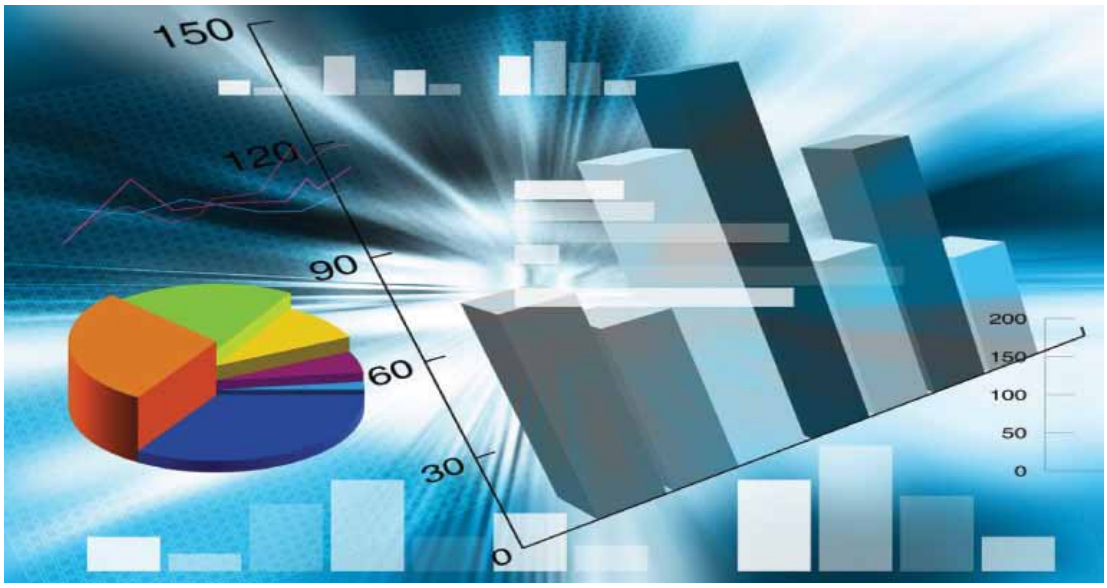
Protect Your Portfolio from Putin & China

By Walid Petiri

Do events overseas, like a newly belligerent Russia and a slower-growing China, make you nervous about your portfolio? Absent a full-scale war in Eastern Europe or a complete collapse of the Chinese economy (both possible yet doubtful), your holdings should be OK.

Russia and China are among the factors that weigh down U.S. stocks thus far this year, along with concerns about sluggish economic growth and tepid future corporate earnings growth. And American investors are anxious these days: The skid stocks took in 2008-09 made everyone from millennials to the Greatest Generation anxious about any string of down days for the big indexes.

Yet the Russian stock market has suffered far more than ours since it annexed Crimea, formerly a part of Ukraine. From a recent peak in mid-February to a month later, Russia's MICEX index tumbled 18%. With the easing of war talk and the U.S. saying it won't use military force in the dispute, the Russian exchange crept back up to just 7% off its high in early April.



True, anything could happen up ahead. In the Ukraine, the situation is fluid. Russia wants the real estate (its Black Sea naval fleet is based on the Crimean peninsula) and is massing troops on the border for possible deployment in Ukraine's eastern section. The cost: *economic sanctions, probably harsh ones.*

At first, the moves were largely symbolic: a suspension of the 2014 G8 summit and the talks on Russia's entry into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and asset freezes for individuals and companies deemed to be hurting democracy in Ukraine. Additional "serious" steps could include financial sanctions for Russian banks, an embargo on arms exports to Russia, and the European Union opting to get more of its energy supplies from other nations. Russia supplies much of the EU's natural gas, via pipeline.

Russia recently raised gas prices in the Ukraine by more than 80%. The Kremlin could also freeze assets on euro-zone companies doing business in the Ukraine, along with continuing the staged war games near the Ukraine. The truth is that the West has very little ability to retaliate against Moscow, which translates into a status quo that is unwelcome, except that it likely means little damage to the markets.

Adding to investors' anxiety this year, China is not growing as fast as it has in the past, when it regularly expanded at a double-digit clip. The World Bank recently cut its full-year projection to 7.6%, from 7.7%. Its exports were down 18.1% year-over-year in February. Analysts polled by Reuters projected China's industrial output rising 9.5% across January and February, but the gain was actually just 8.6%. The Reuters consensus for a yearly retail sales gain of 13.5% for China was also way off; the advance measured in February was 11.8%.

These disappointments further shook Wall Street and rocked the metal markets. A little known fact is that besides being the world's top copper user, China also

employs the base metal as collateral for bank loans, so falling cooper is a double whammy in China.

As Chinese Premier Li Keqiang noted on March 13, the nation's 2014 growth target is 7.5%. But the respected (and very bearish) economist Marc Faber told CNBC he suspects China's growth is more like 4%. The upside, Faber commented, is that 4% "growth in a world that has no growth is actually very good."

We never truly know what tomorrow will bring, so we don't really know what will happen on Wall Street although we can always make educated guesses. Now is a time to not panic and instead be calmly focused on a) Are the gains in some areas of your portfolio over the last few quarters well above target? b) Is now the time to rebalance into assets that have lagged the past few years? c) Is it wise to increase cash while actively looking to diversify your portfolio across different asset classes included alternative investments?

Concentrate on your strategy when turbulence affects the markets. History has shown that staying in the market can prove the right move, even when the news seems cataclysmic (say war with Russia). The bull market that began in March 2009 is nearly the fifth longest lasting in history. Just look at how stocks have rebounded, and hit new highs, since the precipitous fall the Standard & Poor's 500 took during the recession. Sticking with principles of diversification can prove wise in both challenging and record-setting markets as long-term focus and patience have rewarded investors in the past.

Walid Petiri AAMS, RFC, Financial Management Strategies, LLC, www.fmsadvisors.com, 410-779-1276.

Land of Opportunity – The American Dream

By Gary Shumaker

Gary Shumaker

If you were born somewhere else and you've dreamed of coming to the United States and making your fortune—it is possible! One way to do it is to start your own company and take advantage of the perks offered to new citizens by the best customer in the world: the federal government.

The U.S. government offers preferential treatment to companies owned by recognized minorities, including competitions limited to similarly-situated companies and even sole source award—no competition at all!

This article outlines the path to making your fortune by doing business with the government.

An important first step for many (but not all) government contracting opportunities is becoming a U.S. citizen. This can take from a few months to years. The process to obtaining citizenship is well documented on many web sites, and is not the focus of this article.

Your business must also meet any local or state regulations, including setting up an appropriate business entity structure (often incorporation). Again, there is a lot of information readily available on this subject, and it won't be repeated here.

The real jewel of the government's programs to aid small economically and socially disadvantaged companies is the Small Business Administration's 8(a) Business Development Program. Getting into the 8(a) program isn't simple, but it's well worth.

To get into the program, your company must:

- Be majority-owned (51% or more) by a person or persons who qualify individually.
- The qualifying owner(s) must be U.S. citizen(s).
- The qualifying owner(s) must be socially and economically disadvantaged. Although anyone can be socially and economically disadvantaged, members of recognized minorities are presumed to be. It's kind of like "innocent and proven guilty," they are disadvantaged until proven otherwise.
- The qualifying owner(s) must be of good character. This is a little nebulous, but a record of convictions for crimes, or a history of difficulties with government contracting would probably disqualify an application on this ground.
- The qualifying owner(s) have to have skills that give them a probability of success. Some time working in the management of a similar company would easily meet this requirement; a work history with nothing other than unskilled laborer experience probably would not.
- The qualifying owner(s) can't be too rich. This analysis is based on personal financial statements, but does not count the value of an owner's primary residence, or money in such retirement accounts as a 401(k).
- The owner's personal annual salary can't be too high.
- The owner(s) must usually be the most highly compensated employees of the company.
- The firm must be managed and controlled on a full-time basis by the eligible owners. This requirement is designed to prevent "front" companies—companies that do not qualify from setting up a front that is not the real company. The full-time requirement generally prevents the owner(s) from having a second (or "day") job, forcing them to concentrate on growing their small business.
- The company must be a small business. "Small" is measured by different standards for different types of work, usually measured by annual revenue of number of employees. Google "NAICS" to look up the size standards for the type of work you want to do.
- The company must have two years of business history.
- The Company must demonstrate potential for success. This is not a program designed to bail out a failing business.

Once your company is accepted into the 8(a) program, a clock starts ticking. Nine years later, your time is up. No going back, no makeups.

Entry into the 8(a) program qualifies your company for competitions restricted to other 8(a) companies. You're not competing head-to-head against the biggest companies in the industry. This is a huge advantage. It also qualifies you for sole source awards, where there is no competition; the government just awards you the contract because they like you.

Being 8(a) qualifies you for one set of opportunities, but there are other set-aside categories. If your company is 51% or more owned by a woman or women, you are probably eligible for woman-owned set-asides. There is a subset of woman-owned for socially and economically disadvantaged woman owned companies. If your primary office space is located in a Historically Underutilized Business Zone, and you can meet some other requirements, you can qualify for HUBZone set-asides. If you're a veteran of the U.S. military and you can meet some other requirements, you can qualify for veteran-owned set-asides. There's a subcategory of veteran-owned, service disabled veteran owned that also has a lot of opportunities set-aside for it.

The categories other than 8(a) are mostly self-certifying (meaning, if you say you are, you are, unless somebody questions it, although you may have to file some documentation that nobody looks at unless somebody questions your status). Unlike the 8(a) program which has the nine-year time-out, in the other programs a company can remain as long as they can meet the size standard for small in their industry.

There's a relatively low entry cost for an immigrant to become a contractor to the U.S. government. Most people who do it make a significant amount of money. Reduced competition doesn't mean that it's easy, even then, and it's often two or three years after a firm starts vying for government work, even with the advantage of the set-aside programs. Couple that with the time to gather the required experience, start your company, in some cases allow your company to gather the required experience, and then compete for (albeit in limited competitions) and actually win work, it's a matter of years, not days or weeks.

But it can be and has been done. It's the American dream!

Gary E. Shumaker is the founder and senior consultant for Gary E. Shumaker, Inc. He has spent 20 years inside government and more than 25 years in the industry as an executive, business developer, chief operating officer and chief executive officer for multiple small companies in the federal contracting market. He helps small companies develop the intellectual infrastructure to succeed in the federal marketplace. For more information, visit garyeshumaker.net or email gary.shumaker@c2sginc.com.

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MatchMaker — Candidate Information Management System

PAM — Performance Award Manager For Performance - Based Contracts

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USDA Awards Grants to Support Research, Teaching and Extension Programs at 1890 Historically Black Land-Grant Colleges and Universities

Release No. 0030.14
Contact: Office of Communications (202)720-4623

WASHINGTON, February 26, 2014—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced 76 grants totaling more than $35 million to support research, teaching and Extension activities at 1890 Historically Black Land-Grant Colleges and Universities through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Today's announcement builds on USDA's ongoing efforts to foster strong partnerships with the 1890 community, ensure equal access to USDA programs and services, and support educational opportunities for the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

"For nearly 125 years, the 1890 land-grant institutions have played a vital role in ensuring access to higher education and opportunity for underserved communities," said Secretary Vilsack. "These competitively-awarded grants support high quality research, teaching and Extension activities and support the continued leadership of 1890 institutions in the fields of agriculture, the environment and public health."

The 1890 Institution Research, Extension and Teaching Capacity Building Grants (CBG) Program is intended to support agricultural science programs while also strengthening the linkages among the 1890 universities, other colleges and universities, USDA and private industry. The program focuses on advancing cultural diversity in the scientific and professional workforce by attracting and educating more students from underrepresented groups. The CBG program awards grants in the categories of research, teaching and Extension with a focus on NIFA's priority areas of sustainable bioenergy, food security, childhood obesity prevention, climate change and food safety.

NIFA is awarding $17,691,148 through the 1890 CBG Program, including:

Research

- Delaware State University, Dover, Delaware: $299,938 (1 award)
- Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Florida: $300,000 (1 award)
- Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, Georgia: $499,744 (1 award)
- Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky: $504,640 (1 award)
- Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: $784,876 (2 awards)
- Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri: $999,213 (2 awards)
- North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina: $898,618 (3 awards)
- Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma: $600,000 (1 award)
- Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee: $899,624 (3 awards)
- Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia: $590,470 (2 awards)
- West Virginia State University, Institute, West Virginia: $444,346 (1 award)

Extension

- Alabma A&M University, Normal, Alabama: $549,293 (2 awards)
- Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama: $949,979 (2 awards)
- Delaware State University, Dover, Delaware: $452368 (2 awards)
- Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, Georgia: $248,300 (1 award)
- Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: $499,999 (2 awards)
- University of Maryland – Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, Maryland: $250,000 (1 award)
- Alcorn State University, Lorman, Mississippi: $249,262 (1 award)
- North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina: $249,998 (1 award)
- Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee: $498,683 (2 awards)
- Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas: $249,251 (1 award)
- West Virginia State University, Institute, West Virginia: $598,556 (1 award)

Teaching

- Alabama A&M University, Normal, Alabama: $1,149,050 (4 awards)
- Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama: $299,991 (2 awards)

- Delaware State University, Dover, Delaware: $749,951 (2 awards)
- Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Florida: $147,696
- Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, Georgia: $392,140 (2 awards)
- Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky: $1,349,997 (3 awards)
- Alcorn State University, Lorman, Mississippi: $149,946 (1 award)
- Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missoui: $299,807 (2 awards)
- North Carolina State A&T University, Greensboro, North Carolina: $431,738 (3 awards)
- Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee: $150,000 (1 award)
- Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia: $300,000 (1 award)
- West Virginia State University, Institute, West Virginia: $653,674 (2 awards)

The 1890 Facilities Grants Program provides funds for acquiring and improving food sciences facilities and equipment, including libraries. Grants equip 1890 land-grant universities to fully address research, Extension and academic needs.

NIFA is awarding $18,204,579 through the 1890 Facilities Grants Program, including:

- Alabama A&M University, Normal, Alabama: $965,935
- Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama: $965,936
- University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Pine Bluff, Arkansas: $895,228
- Delaware State University, Dover, Delaware: $685,691
- Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Florida: $904,734
- Fort Valley State University, Fort Valley, Georgia: $904,734
- Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Kentucky: $1,123,637
- Southern University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana: $841,111
- University of Maryland- Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, Maryland: $782,708
- Alcorn State University, Lorman, Mississippi: $900,178
- Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri: $1,145,073
- North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina: $1,137,940
- Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma: $951,107
- South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, South Carolina: $890,638
- Tennessee State University, Nashville, Tennessee: $1,061,437
- Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas: $1,424,221
- Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia: $981,494
- West Virginia State University, Institute, West Virginia: $800,018

The 1890 Historically Black Land-Grant Colleges and Universities play a critical role in teaching students to meet the high quality, innovative research needs that are vital to the wellbeing of our nation's food, fuel and fiber. USDA's 1890 National Program works with universities and community-based organizations to bring services and information to rural-based minority communities, and limited resource, veteran and female farmers, including conducting 53 Ag Summer enrichment programs for more than 33,140 elementary through high school students in 2013 and in fiscal year 2012, providing information to approximately 60,843 small farmers, ranchers, and farming organizations in underserved communities.

Through its 1890's Scholars Program, USDA attracts students into careers that benefit their communities and the Department; share expertise and resources in areas such as agricultural research, extension and teaching programs, and technology development. To date, nearly 600 employees have been hired through the program. USDA is accepting applications until March 14, 2014. Visit http://www.outreach.usda.gov/education/1890 for more information.

The 2014 Farm Bill, passed by Congress and signed by President Obama earlier this month, designated Central State University, a historically black university in Wilberforce, Ohio, as a land-grant institution. Beginning fiscal year 2016, Central State University will be eligible to receive USDA funding to bolster its capacity to conduct research, Extension and teaching activities. The university is currently eligible to apply for NIFA's competitive grants programs, including the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative.

NIFA recently released the request for applications (RFA) for the fiscal year 2014 1890 CBG program. The deadline for proposals is March 19, 2014. In addition to the research, teaching and Extension components, this year the CBG program will feature professional development grants to help faculty enhance their networking and competitive capacity by working collaboratively with colleagues from 1890 and 1862 Land-grant Universities, other public and private universities, federal agencies, private and non-governmental institutions, foundations, and other domestic and international research entities. The training, which may take the form of sabbaticals, mini-sabbaticals, faculty exchanges, or educational courses, must address critical U.S. food, agricultural and human science issues at the local, state, regional and national level.

The maximum award for professional development grants is $100,000. Funds may be used for salary and benefits (up to one year), travel, supplies and training or course fees. Funds will not be awarded to support activities in fulfillment of degree requirements or travel to make presentations at conferences or meetings.

Through federal funding and leadership for research, education and extension programs, NIFA focuses on investing in science and solving critical issues impacting people's daily lives and the nation's future. Of the $647 million awarded to 1890's universities from 2009 through 2013, more than $600 million was awarded for research and development in the form of grants, cooperative research and development agreements, research support agreements and specific cooperative agreements. Ongoing research and development studies are conducted with several HBCUs and 1890 Land-Grant Institutions, including, but not limited to, Alcorn State University, Alabama A&M University, Delaware State University, Tennessee State University, the University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff, and the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore. More information is at www.nifa.usda.gov.

O'Malley-Brown Administration Announces Strategic Enhancements to Maryland's Nation-Leading MBE Program

Reports that in FY2013 MBEs received $1.67 billion in awards

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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February 27, 2014 *(Baltimore, MD)* – Governor Martin O'Malley today announced a series of steps to create even more opportunity for Maryland businesses through the state's Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) Program. The changes include providing MBEs with advanced notice on all new solicitations over $100,000, and increasing agency oversight for state contracts over $25 million.

"Expanding opportunity for all Marylanders has been the guiding principle of the choices we've made as a State, and with Maryland ranked among the top states for upward economic mobility by the Pew Center, we're getting real results," said Governor Martin O'Malley. "Maryland's MBE program is a national model for minority inclusion, but we can do better. The enhancements we're proposing today will help modernize our MBE program, and help ensure that we do everything possible to help more minority and small businesses succeed."

In an effort to impact minority participation at the outset of the procurement process, Governor O'Malley is directing all participating agencies to obtain the Governor's Office of Minority Affairs' (GOMA) approval of MBE goals prior to issuing a solicitation for all statewide master contracts or procurements expected to exceed $25 million. This is designed to ensure that all MBE opportunities have been identified at the agency level.

For MBE firms trying to engage in State contracting, GOMA's website will include forecasting reports on contracts expected to exceed $100,000 during the fiscal year. The reports are useful in helping small and minority-owned businesses identify which agencies buy what they sell, and with what frequency. These reports also provide them with time to effectively compete for these contracting opportunities with the State.

"Our commitment to minority and women-owned businesses has been a critical part of our effort to create jobs and expand economic opportunity throughout Maryland," said Lt. Governor Anthony Brown. "As we look to the future, we're going to continue to strengthen our MBE program and ensure that we're supporting Maryland's minority and women owned businesses, wherever they're found."

MBE goals are set on a contract-by-contract basis. GOMA works with agency buyers to ensure that all subcontracting opportunities are identified when the solicitation is being developed. Particular focus is given to those agencies that award more than $25 million annually.

GOMA also announced today that MBEs were awarded $1.67 billion in FY2013, representing 24.4% of the total $6.87 billion in contracts awarded by the 70 participating agencies/departments across state government. GOMA will publish the FY2013 Minority Business Enterprise Program Statistical Report in mid-March.

"Maryland has one of the oldest and most ambitious MBE Program in the nation," commented Zenita Wickham Hurley, Special Secretary of Minority Affairs. "As we continue to fight against discrimination, we will also continue to strengthen the program with legislative and policy enhancements."

Overall MBE participation in FY2012 was 25.2%, representing $1.92 billion in MBE awards of the $7.65 billion in total awards. Overall MBE participation between FY2012 and FY2013 declined slightly (by less than 1 percent).

Maryland has taken other steps to boost MBE participation as well, raising the goal for participation to 29 percent effective FY2014. In 2013, Maryland became the first state to include a liquidated damages provision on all contracts with an MBE goal in the event a prime contractor does not comply in good faith with its MBE participation commitments. In 2012, the prime contractor's MBE commitments were made an enforceable part of the executed contract with the State. And in 2011, the program's sub-goal policy was amended to include Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans in addition to African Americans and women.

This year, GOMA is proposing a regulation to allow the value of the work performed by an MBE prime to count toward 50 percent of the MBE contract goal. Current regulations prohibit MBEs that perform as prime contractors from counting any of their own work toward the goal. Following a public comment period, the regulation change is expected to take effect this summer.

EPA to Lift Suspension and Debarment of BP From Federal Government Contracts

Agreement contains strong provisions to continue safety and ethics improvements in order to comply

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 13, 2014
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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Environmental Protection Agency and BP today executed an agreement resolving all suspension and debarment actions against BP that barred the company from doing business with the federal government following the company's guilty plea in the Deepwater Horizon disaster of April 2010. The administrative agreement will be in place for five years.

"This is a fair agreement that requires BP to improve its practices in order to meet the terms we've outlined together," said EPA Assistant Administrator of Administration and Resources Craig Hooks. "Many months of discussions and assessments have led up to this point, and I'm confident we've secured strong provisions to protect the integrity of federal procurement programs."

Under the agreement, BP is required to retain an independent auditor approved by EPA who will conduct an annual review and report on BP's compliance with the agreement. There are also specific provisions addressing ethics compliance, corporate governance, and process safety. The agreement additionally provides EPA the authority to take appropriate corrective action in the event the agreement is breached. EPA coordinated this matter with the Department of Interior, Defense Logistics Agency and U.S. Coast Guard.

Since November 2012, EPA has suspended 25 BP entities and disqualified BP Exploration and Production, Inc. from performing federal contract work at its corporate facility in Houston, Texas, stemming from its criminal conviction in the U.S. Government's Deepwater Horizon case. Suspensions are issued where there is an immediate need to protect the public interest supported by adequate evidence. The suspension did not affect existing agreements BP had with the government.

The agreement announced today takes effect immediately.

Coal Companies and Subsidiaries to Spend Estimated $200 Million on Treatment and System-wide Upgrades to Reduce Water Pollution

$27.5 Million Civil Penalty is Largest in History Under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 5, 2014

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WASHINGTON – Alpha Natural Resources, Inc. (Alpha), one of the nation's largest coal companies, Alpha Appalachian Holdings (formerly Massey Energy), and 66 subsidiaries have agreed to spend an estimated $200 million to install and operate wastewater treatment systems and to implement comprehensive, system-wide upgrades to reduce discharges of pollution from coal mines in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, the Department of Justice and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced today. Overall, the settlement covers approximately 79 active mines and 25 processing plants in these five states.

EPA estimates that the upgrades and advanced treatment required by the settlement will reduce discharges of total dissolved solids by over 36 million pounds each year, and will cut metals and other pollutants by approximately nine

million pounds per year. The companies will also pay a civil penalty of $27.5 million for thousands of permit violations, which is the largest penalty in history under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act (CWA).

"This settlement is the result of state and federal agencies working together to protect local communities from pollution by enforcing the law," said Cynthia Giles, Assistant Administrator of EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance. "By requiring reforms and a robust compliance program, we are helping to ensure coal mining in Appalachia follows environmental laws that protect public health."

"The unprecedented size of the civil penalty in this settlement sends a strong deterrent message to others in this industry that such egregious violations of the nation's Clean Water Act will not be tolerated," said Robert G. Dreher, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division. "Today's agreement is good news for communities across Appalachia, who have too often been vulnerable to polluters who disregard the law. It holds Alpha accountable and will bring increased compliance and transparency among Alpha and its many subsidiaries."

In addition to paying the penalty, the companies must build and operate treatment systems to eliminate violations of selenium and salinity limits, and also implement comprehensive, system-wide improvements to ensure future compliance with the CWA. These improvements, which apply to all of Alpha's operations in Appalachia, include developing and implementing an environmental management system and periodic internal and third-party environmental compliance audits.

The companies must also maintain a database to track violations and compliance efforts at each outfall, significantly improve the timeliness of responding to violations, and consult with third party experts to solve problem discharges. In the event of future violations, the companies will be required to pay stipulated penalties, which may be increased and, in some cases, doubled for continuing violations.

The government complaint alleged that, between 2006 and 2013, Alpha and its subsidiaries routinely violated limits in 336 of its state-issued CWA permits, resulting in the discharge of excess amounts of pollutants into hundreds of rivers and streams in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The violations also included discharge of pollutants without a permit.

In total, EPA documented at least 6,289 violations of permit limits for pollutants that include iron, pH, total suspended solids, aluminum, manganese, selenium, and salinity. These violations occurred at 794 different discharge points, or outfalls. Monitoring records also showed that multiple pollutants were discharged in amounts of more than twice the permitted limit on many occasions. Most violations stemmed from the company's failure to properly operate existing treatment systems, install adequate treatment systems, and implement appropriate water handling and management plans.

Today's settlement also resolves violations of a prior 2008 settlement with Massey Energy, and applies to the facilities and sites formerly owned by the company. Under the 2008 settlement, Massey paid a $20 million penalty to the federal government for similar CWA violations, in addition to over a million dollars in stipulated penalties over the course of the next two years. Alpha purchased Massey in June 2011 and, since taking over the company, has been working cooperatively with the government in developing the terms of today's settlement.

CWA permits allow for the discharge of certain pollutants in limited amounts to rivers, streams, and other water bodies. Permit holders are required to monitor discharges regularly and report results to the respective state agencies.

Alpha, headquartered in Bristol, Va., is one of the largest coal companies in the nation. Alpha operates more than 79 active coal mines and 25 coal preparation plants located throughout Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wyoming. The Wyoming operations are not included in today's settlement.

The States of West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky are co-plaintiffs in today's settlement. The U.S. will receive half of the civil penalty and the other half will be divided between the co-plaintiffs based on the number of violations in each state, as follows: West Virginia ($8,937,500), Pennsylvania ($4,125,000), and Kentucky ($687,500).

The consent decree, lodged in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia, is subject to a 30-day public comment period and approval by the federal court.

More information on the settlement: http://www2.epa.gov/enforcement/alpha-natural-resources-inc-settlement

More information on Clean Water Act Enforcement: http://www.epa.gov/compliance/civil/cwa/index.html

Here's What They're Saying about EPA's Final Cleaner Fuel and Car Standards

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - March 3, 2014
CONTACT: press@epa.gov

WASHINGTON – Based on extensive input from auto manufactures, refiners, states and public health and environmental organizations, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today announced sensible standards for cars and gasoline that will significantly reduce harmful pollution, prevent thousands of premature deaths and illnesses, while also enabling efficiency improvements in the cars and trucks we drive. These cleaner fuels and cars standards are an important component of the administration's national program for clean cars and trucks, which also include historic fuel efficiency standards that are saving new vehicle owners at the gas pump today. The standards will significantly reduce ground-level ozone, particulate matter, benzene and other air toxics in the air we breathe.

Autos/Industry/Labor

General Motors
"Today, the EPA took steps to harmonize regulations to improve air quality by issuing its final rule on Tier 3 tailpipe emission standards. We appreciate EPA's treatment of vehicles and fuels as a system by introducing lower sulfur market fuel."

GM looks forward to reviewing the specifics of the Tier 3 final rule, but it appears EPA has effectively harmonized the federal and state vehicle emissions requirements. We commend the agency for understanding the importance of this objective and creating one set of emissions standards for our vehicles nationwide.

In addition, we support the provisions for lower sulfur levels in fuels. Since the vehicle emission system and the fuel used act together in determining the emissions performance of the vehicle, automakers need cleaner fuels to achieve the lowest possible emissions. In addition, cleaner fuels provide the added benefit of reducing emissions immediately across the entire on-road fleet.

And finally, we commend EPA for selecting a certification fuel that is representative of in-use fuels. This allows OEMs to optimize vehicle performance to an actual fuel that our customers use nationwide.

John Viera, director, Sustainability and Vehicle Environmental Matters, Ford
"Automakers have dramatically reduced vehicle emissions by 99 percent during the last four decades, and today's announcement builds on the good work we already have done. Ford is committed to continuing to reduce emissions across our vehicle lineup. We also are proud of the progress we have made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from our vehicles and facilities, cut energy and water usage in the vehicle manufacturing process, and increase the fuel-efficiency of Ford's vehicles, including our plug-in hybrids and full electric offerings."

Toyota
Toyota supports EPA's efforts to advance the nation's clean air goals. The Tier 3 standards announced today continue to recognize the importance of treating vehicles and fuels as a system, by linking lower sulfur gasoline with more stringent vehicle emission standards. Lower sulfur gasoline not only results in cleaner air, but also enables advanced engine technologies to help improve vehicle fuel economy.

"We commend EPA for its collaboration with California in an effort to further harmonize the next-generation of emission standards," said Tom Stricker, vice president of technical and regulatory affairs, Toyota Motor North America. "This is an important step toward Toyota's ultimate objective of a single national emissions and fuel economy program."

While a review of the regulation details is still needed, Toyota is supportive of the overall direction embodied in today's announcement.

Kia Motor America
"EPA's new Tier 3 standards, which treat vehicles and fuels as a system, are a critical step forward in bringing smog-forming vehicle emissions close to zero. Of particular importance is the reduction of sulfur levels in gasoline, which will yield an immediate and cost-effective air quality improvement from vehicles that are already on the road. Honda commends EPA for this rational approach to clean air regulation."

Edward B. Cohen, Vice President, Government & Industry Relations Honda North America, Inc.
"In keeping with our commitment to clean mobility, Kia Motors America praises the Environmental Protection Agency for its decision today to reduce the amount of sulfur in gasoline with a single national standard for the industry. This EPA ruling will result in lower emissions and reduced greenhouse gases from all gasoline-powered vehicles in operation – and, most importantly, cleaner air for all. In addition to the immediate benefits, ultra-low sulfur fuel will enable a wider range of technologies to meet environmental needs and reach higher fuel economy standards for the future."

"Hyundai Motor America applauds the EPA's decision today to promote cleaner air. The rule will align key provisions

of federal and California emissions rules, replacing two standards with a single national standard for manufacturers to meet in the vehicles they design and build. Also, EPA's rule will reduce the amount of sulfur allowed in gasoline, providing drivers of both new and older cars with an improved fuel to meet stricter emissions standards."

Michael J. Stanton, president and CEO of Global Automakers

"Reducing sulfur in gasoline brings instant benefits to consumers and the environment," said Michael J. Stanton, president and CEO of Global Automakers. This rulemaking will reduce emissions from the existing fleet of vehicles on our roads today and opens the door for even cleaner cars in the future."

Mitch Bainwol, president, Alliance of Automobile Manufactures

"Automakers have already reduced vehicle emissions by 99%, and we're seeking more progress while still delivering high quality, affordable vehicles to our customers. Today's announcement links autos and fuels together, recognizing that our cleaner cars will need cleaner fuels to fully achieve and optimize the improvements we are being asked to make. Cars are so clean that we are now reducing the last 1% of emissions, and Tier 3 will take us three-quarters of the way toward that goal. In addition, consumers will benefit from having a single program nationwide, harmonizing California standards with federal standards and avoiding the costly duplication of regulations."

Emission Control Technology Association

"We commend the EPA for its leadership in acting to improve the air we breathe and stimulate the economy by adopting Tier 3," said Tim Regan, President of the Emission Control Technology Association which represents the world's leading developers of emission control technology. "Rarely does Government have an opportunity, as it does with Tier 3, to make such a significant, immediate improvement in the lives of all Americans. As an industry, we are proud to stand with the Administration and a broad coalition of organizations in supporting these new rules."

"ECTA is pleased, too, that the study we commissioned from Navigant Economics provided critical economic analysis showing that these regulations will not adversely impact consumers, but will stimulate billions of dollars in economic activity and create thousands of new jobs," Regan added. "Furthermore, the adoption of Tier 3 will enable domestic environmental technology manufacturers to produce new technologies for the U.S. market and export them to foreign markets with similar automobile standards, including Europe, Japan and Korea – and, over time, other significant markets."

"Tier 3 is a winner for millions of American who regularly breathe unhealthy air and for the thousands of workers who will benefit from an enhanced manufacturing sector," Regan added.

Joe Kubsh, executive director, Manufacturers of Emission Controls Association (MECA)

"EPA's Tier 3 rule will provide a significant opportunity to further reduce emissions from the light-duty vehicle fleet by utilizing an integrated systems approach that combines advanced emission control technologies with advanced engine designs and very low sulfur gasoline fuel. In addition, these advanced emission control technologies will enable all current and future high-efficiency vehicle powertrains to be viable options for complying with EPA's greenhouse gas pollutant standards," said MECA's executive director, Joseph Kubsh. "MECA congratulates the agency for all of its hard work in getting this rule finalized and for its continued efforts in helping to achieve the goal of cleaner air for all Americans. Our industry is prepared to do its part to deliver cost-effective, advanced emission control technologies to the marketplace."

Chris Miller, executive director, Advanced Engine Systems Institute (AESI)

AESI Executive Director, Chris Miller, said "Our members and their employees are pleased that the USEPA has issued a final Tier 3 rule to further reduce sulfur in fuels and enable use of the most advanced clean car technologies. This action gives important clarity to our industry so we can act on long-planned manufacturing investments which will secure America's continued global leadership in this field. We fully expect that new standards will contribute greatly and quickly to better air quality in communities across the country at very low cost."

Ken Zerafa, president, Umicore Autocat USA, Inc.

Umicore compliments the EPA for its forward thinking in establishing the Tier 3 emission control regulations. This regulation, which covers a ten year vehicle model design basis as well as harmonizing with California LEVIII, will solidify our company's long term investment and product development strategies to meet the market demands for these vehicles. In addition it will stabilize our workforce for the present and create future highly skilled jobs in research, engineering and manufacturing.

The reduced sulfur level with allow us to develop new catalyst technologies to meet various engine operating designs and also improve the performance of the current fleet.

Titus Iwaszkiewicz, president, Emitec Inc.

"Despite popular mis-conceptions, air pollution from motor vehicles is still a serious threat both to the environment and to our health. Tier 3 regulations are an important step towards improving air quality in the numerous areas of the United States that don't currently meet the air quality standards set forth by the Clean Air Act. Protecting the environment is an on-going commitment that we can't allow to fade into the shadows. Although some may view emissions legislation as having a negative impact on the economy, quite the opposite is true. The jobs created by emissions control technology as well as the health care costs avoided by a clean environment more than compensate for the incremental costs associated with manufacturing cleaner products. Additionally, healthy people are more productive!"

Bob King, president, United Auto Workers

"We commend the EPA for its leadership in acting to improve the air we breathe and stimulate the economy by adopting Tier 3," said Tim Regan, President of the Emission Control Technology Association which represents the world's leading

developers of emission control technology. "Rarely does Government have an opportunity, as it does with Tier 3, to make such a significant, immediate improvement in the lives of all Americans. As an industry, we are proud to stand with the Administration and a broad coalition of organizations in supporting these new rules." "ECTA is pleased, too, that the study we commissioned from Navigant Economics provided critical economic analysis showing that these regulations will not adversely impact consumers, but will stimulate billions of dollars in economic activity and create thousands of new jobs," Regan added. "Furthermore, the adoption of Tier 3 will enable domestic environmental technology manufacturers to produce new technologies for the U.S. market and export them to foreign markets with similar automobile standards, including Europe, Japan and Korea – and, over time, other significant markets."

United Steelworkers
"These regulations will place the United States in the forefront of emissions controls with USW members continuing as leaders in building these technologies," said USW International President Leo W. Gerard. "Our members have helped to eliminate over 40 billion tons of carbon monoxide from entering the air we breathe.

"EPA's regulations will keep the United States competitive in global fuel standards and reduce 23,000 upper and lower respiratory symptoms in children, improving the air we breathe."States "Nearly 90 percent of refineries can either comply with the regulations tomorrow, make operational changes or revamp to comply in less than two years," said USW international Vice President Gary Beevers, who heads the union's oil sector.

States

Robert M. Summers, secretary, Maryland Department of the Environment
"By issuing these new, robust vehicle and fuel quality standards, President Obama and the Environmental Protection Agency have clearly demonstrated their commitment to protecting the public's health and our environment. Reductions from motor vehicles are one of the most important strategies needed to provide clean air to Maryland's citizens today and for generations to come. These actions will also provide a significant benefit to the Chesapeake Bay, as approximately one-third of its nitrogen issues are caused by air pollution. Together with our federal partners, we can create a more sustainable future for our children."

Janet Coit, director, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
"I applaud EPA for taking this important step to reduce emissions from motor vehicles. The lower sulfur gasoline component of the new Tier 3 standards will provide instant results. Indeed, of all the air pollution control measures currently under consideration by EPA, this rule will provide the greatest and most immediate air quality benefit for citizens in the State of Rhode Island. We can all breathe easier due to having a strong leader in EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy."

David K. Paylor, director, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality
"The Commonwealth of Virginia supports EPA's Tier III motor vehicle emission and gasoline regulations because they are necessary to protect the health of our citizens. The Tier III regulations are feasible and essential to meet the health-based National Ambient Air Quality Standards for ozone in Northern Virginia in a timely and cost effective manner. The cars and trucks to which the Tier III regulations apply are significant contributors to ozone pollution. Tier III's low-sulfur gasoline standard of 10 parts per million will improve the effectiveness of NOx controls on existing vehicles, thereby reducing NOx emissions by nearly 300,000 tons per year nationwide at what projects to be a very reasonable price. In the absence of the Tier III regulations, Virginia would be forced to find additional NOx reductions from other already well controlled sources at a much higher cost."

Kenneth Kimmell, commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
"EPA has taken a giant step forward by finalizing regulations that cut harmful pollutants from existing and new cars and trucks," said Kenneth Kimmell, commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. "We will see cleaner air and healthier families in Massachusetts because of this common sense, cost-effective rule to reduce the amount of sulfur in gasoline."

Mary D. Nichols, chairman,
California Air Resources Board
"California applauds our federal partners for taking this important step to align Tier 3 with California's low-emission vehicle standards," said California Air Resources Board Chairman Mary D. Nichols. "This will deliver a single national clean cars program for the benefit of public health, consumers, and the car industry."

Gary W. Pruitt, air pollution control officer/executive director, Yakima Regional Clean Air Agency, Yakima, WA
"As an area which has struggled to attain the 24-hour PM2.5 standard, we strongly support this control strategy which comes at so little public cost and yet all but guarantees our area will never exceed the standard. The significant reduction of NOx available for secondary formation of aerosol nitrates alone could accomplish this goal."

Craig Kenworthy, executive director,
Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, Seattle, WA
"Adoption of the EPA Tier 3 rule is a cost-effective way for the people in our region to breathe cleaner air and make us healthier. The rule is also central to helping Tacoma/Pierce County achieve and maintain federal fine particle pollution standards."

Robert Klee, commissioner, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
"Cleaning up our nation's cars and fuels is one of the most cost effective ways to reduce air pollution and protect public health," said Commissioner Robert Klee of Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. "We support EPA's action on the Tier 3 rule because it will provide cleaner air for everyone in Connecticut and throughout our nation."

Mayor Annise D. Parker, Houston, TX
"We applaud the EPA for adopting Tier 3 vehicle emissions and gasoline standards for cars and light trucks effective in 2017. It will mean less ozone in Houston's air, getting us closer to meeting the national standard for ozone while best protecting public health. We are proud of the work we are doing in Houston to significantly improve air quality but we cannot do it alone."

Environmental/Public Health Organizations

Harold Wimmer, national president and CEO of the American Lung Association
"Cars, light trucks, and SUVs are major sources of pollution that can harm the health of our most vulnerable family members and neighbors, including those who suffer from asthma, lung and heart disease, as well as those who live, work and go to school near major roadways," said Harold Wimmer, national president and CEO of the American Lung Association. "We thank the Obama Administration and

Environmental Protection Agency for putting these critical public health safeguards in place to protect communities across the nation."

Albert A. Rizzo, MD, past-chair of the National Board of Directors at the American Lung Association, and section chief of Pulmonary/Critical Care Medicine for Christiana Care Health System in Newark, Delaware
"The standards will reduce harmful air pollutants including nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds. These pollutants are important precursors of ozone pollution and particle pollution," said Albert A. Rizzo, MD, Past-Chair of the National Board of Directors at the American Lung Association, and Section Chief of Pulmonary/Critical Care Medicine for Christiana Care Health System in Newark, Delaware. "By reducing these pollutants and making our air healthier, we will bring relief to those suffering from asthma, other lung diseases and cardiovascular disease, and to the nation as a whole.

Michelle Robinson, director of Union of Concerned Scientists' Clean Vehicles Program
"Finalizing these standards is life-changing for people from all walks of life. Every day, tens of millions of Americans breathe unhealthy air, and reducing pollution from our cars and trucks is a critical part of the solution.

"These science-based standards represent the single most effective step our country can take to reduce smog generated from our daily driving. Tier 3 is a cost-effective way to ensure we can get where we need to go in our cars and trucks each day, without threatening our air and our health.

"Getting here took the work of a diverse coalition of science, health, environmental, labor, faith and industry groups and strong leadership from the Environmental Protection Agency to push the standards over the finish line. Today we thank Administrator McCarthy and the EPA for protecting tens of thousands of Americans from air pollution from our gasoline and tailpipes.

"It's hard to imagine how anyone could argue against protecting thousands of lives at the cost of less than a penny a gallon. But the oil industry has chosen to do just that, asserting once again that its profits are more important than the health and welfare of the American people. We are not surprised that the oil industry is trying to block progress instead of investing in a cleaner fuel future, but they'll need more than dubious claims and fear mongering to stop the country from enjoying the cleaner air, better health, and jobs that Tier 3 will bring."

The Rev. Mitchell C. Hescox, president/C.E.O. Evangelical Environmental Network
We're proud to stand together with EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy, The American Lung Association, the car industry and wide variety of other manufacturers to celebrate the promulgation of the Tier 3 Motor Vehicle Emissions and Fuel Standards.

We've made good process in cleaning up our air, but our children are still at risk. The American Lung Association calculates that these standards will prevent more than 2,500 premature deaths and more than 15,000 asthma attacks each year by 2030. For pro-life evangelicals like myself this is great news, given that medical research links vehicle pollution to birth defects. It's simple: cleaner fuels lead to purer air and healthier kids. And all for one penny a gallon. That's a good deal for all of us.

The Tier 3 Standards are another great example of industry, government, and citizens working together for a healthier, cleaner America. The more we work together the better for us all.

George Slover, senior policy counsel for Consumers Union
George Slover, senior policy counsel for Consumers Union, said, "Millions of Americans struggle with health issues like asthma and respiratory problems that come from breathing air that's heavy with smog and other pollutants. These rules will reduce air pollution by promoting cleaner gasoline and cleaner cars, and as a consumer group, we think it's going to make a big difference for public health. Low-sulfur gasoline will help automakers develop new technologies for more fuel-efficient cars and trucks, and when you add up the benefits for better health and better vehicles, we think it's a big win for consumers."

Fred Krupp, president of Environmental Defense Fund
"President Obama and Administrator McCarthy deserve great credit for this important step forward for clean air. These strong new tailpipe and gasoline standards will cut pollution and save thousands of lives every year. By reducing dangerous pollutants including particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds in our air, these new clean air standards will help all American families breathe easier, especially those dealing with asthma and other lung ailments. These new protections are supported by businesses, unions, public health groups, and states -- including the U.S. auto industry, United Auto Workers, American Lung Association, and the state of Utah. This broad coalition demonstrates, once again, that we can have a cleaner environment and a strong economy at the same time."

Ex-Im Bank Signs $100 Million Agreement with PTA Bank

For Immediate Release: Friday, April 11, 2014
Media Contact: Lawton King (202-565-3200)

Washington, DC – Fred P. Hochberg, chairman and president of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (Ex-Im Bank), and Admassu Tadesse, president and chief executive of the Eastern and Southern African Trade and Development Bank (PTA Bank), signed a $100 million memorandum of understanding (MOU) at a conference hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce at the GE "Garage" here yesterday.

"Yesterday we reached an agreement to work with members of the sub-Saharan African Diaspora community in America who wish to export U.S. goods and services to their home countries. The agreement aligns with the White House's 'U.S. Strategy Toward sub-Saharan Africa,' which focuses on growth in the region," said Chairman Hochberg. "By engaging Diaspora-owned businesses, the arrangement will help U.S. companies capitalize on unique opportunities abroad and support jobs here at home while contributing to the development of sub-Saharan Africa."

The MOU signing capped a conference titled "Unlocking Growth in Africa: How the Diaspora can Partner with the Public and Private Sectors in the U.S. and Africa" held at the GE-powered "Garage," a new high-tech experiential showcase where visitors can try out the latest technologies, including 3D printers and laser cutters.

According to the MOU, Ex-Im Bank and PTA Bank will explore options for utilizing up to $100 million in Ex-Im Bank medium- and long-term loan guarantees and/or direct loans to finance U.S. exports to sub-Saharan Africa that target both Diaspora businesses in the U.S. and PTA Bank's member states.

Ex-Im Bank and PTA Bank have joined forces on number of transactions over the last 15 years to boost trade finance and U.S. exports to Africa. In 2011, Ex-Im Bank guaranteed a $60 million loan extended by HSBC to PTA Bank that financed the sale of American aircraft to Rwanda's Rw and Air Express.

"PTA Bank has been growing its financing by about 30% per annum, of which close to half has gone into energy and infrastructure, with the renewable sub-sector a beneficiary. In the past two years, we have co-financed several independent power producers in various countries such as Kenya, Mauritius, Tanzania and Uganda, including wind farms and mini-hydros," Mr. Tadesse said. "We are keen on furthering our financing of infrastructure and power development, and are looking forward to expanded financial cooperation with long-standing partners such as U.S. Exim Bank, among others."

PTA Bank is a multilateral development bank that provides development capital and services to advance regional growth and integration.

In the past four years, Ex-Im Bank has authorized more than $4 billion in financing for U.S. exports to sub-Saharan Africa. In FY 2013 alone, Ex-Im Bank authorized a record 188 transactions totaling $604 million to facilitate exports to the region. Ex-Im Bank-supported exports accounted for three percent of all U.S. merchandise exports to sub-Saharan Africa during the same timeframe.

USDA Announces $150 Million Investment Fund to Grow Small Businesses, Create Jobs in Rural America

New Fund, Established as Part of White House Rural Council's "Made in Rural America" Export and Investment Initiative, Now Allows USDA to Facilitate Private Equity Investments in Agriculture-related Businesses

Fund is the First of Upcoming Announcements on Boosting Investment in Rural America; White House Rural Opportunity Investment Conference to be Held in July

Release No. 0067.14
Contact: Office of Communications (202)720-4623

Cedar Rapids, Iowa, April 21, 2014 – As part of the Obama Administration's new "Made in Rural America" export and investment initiative, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced the creation of a new investment fund that will help propel the growth of small businesses across rural America. The new Rural Business Investment Company (RBIC) will now allow USDA to facilitate private equity investments in agriculture-related businesses. Currently, USDA programs exist to help provide loans or loan guarantees to help rural businesses grow, but many small cutting-edge businesses also need equity support in addition to or instead of borrowed funds.

Advantage Capital Partners, which will manage the new fund, and their partners from eight Farm Credit institutions have pledged to invest nearly $150 million into the new effort.

"This new fund will allow innovative small businesses throughout rural America to access the capital they need to grow and create jobs," Vilsack said. "One of USDA's top priorities is to help reenergize the rural economy, and we now have a powerful new tool available to help achieve that goal. This new partnership will allow us to facilitate private investment in businesses working in bio-manufacturing, advanced energy production, local and regional food systems, improved farming technologies and other cutting-edge fields."

The fund is being formed under the USDA's Rural Business Investment Program (RBIP). USDA utilizes RBIP to license funds to invest in enterprises that will create growth and job opportunities in rural areas, with an emphasis on smaller enterprises. Working through the USDA program enables licensed funds to raise capital from Farm Credit System banks and associations.

The Farm Credit System, a nationwide network of banks and lending associations specifically chartered to serve agriculture and the U.S. rural economy, is an essential provider of credit to agriculture and rural America. This new partnership between Farm Credit institutions and Advantage Capital, a leading growth capital and small business finance firm, brings together resources and people that are focused on providing more private capital, small business investment and quality jobs to rural America. This public-private partnership will have a tangible positive impact on our rural economy and is a model of how government can serve as a catalyst for private investment in rural America.

Eight Farm Credit institutions providing initial investments in the RBIC fund are: AgStar Financial Services (Mankato, Minn.); AgriBank (St. Paul, Minn.); Capital Farm Credit (Bryan, Texas); CoBank (Denver, Colo.); Farm Credit Bank of Texas (Austin, Texas); Farm Credit Services of America (Omaha, Neb.); Farm Credit Mid-America (Louisville, Ky.); and United Farm Credit Service (Willmar, Minn.).

USDA also announced that it will be accepting applications for other new Rural Business Investment Companies such as the one announced today. Interested applicants have until July 29th to submit their applications for review in FY2014. Any application accepted after this deadline will be held for consideration next year. USDA intends to accept RBIC applications through 2016, detailed information including application materials and instructions can be found at: www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_RBIP.html.

In addition, Secretary Vilsack said that the White House Rural Council, as part of the Made in Rural America initiative, will convene the Rural Opportunity Investment Conference later this year to attract additional investments to rural America by connecting major investors with rural business leaders, government officials, economic development experts and other partners. This conference will promote opportunities to invest in rural America by highlighting successful projects in energy, biofuels and bioproducts, infrastructure, transportation, water systems, telecommunications, health care, manufacturing, and local and regional food systems. To learn more about the conference, visit www.usda.gov/investmentconference.

About the White House Rural Council

To address challenges in Rural America, build on the Administration's rural economic strategy, and improve the implementation of that strategy, the President signed an Executive Order establishing the White House Rural Council. The Council coordinates the Administration's efforts in rural America by streamlining and improving the effectiveness of federal programs serving rural America; engage stakeholders, including farmers, ranchers, and local citizens, on issues and solutions in rural communities; and promoting and coordinating private-sector partnerships. With the signing of the Farm Bill in early February, President Obama directed the Council to lead a new "Made in Rural America" export and investment initiative, charged with bringing together Federal resources to help rural businesses and leaders take advantage of new investment opportunities and access new customers and markets abroad. The work of the White House Rural Council and USDA to bring investment to rural America is an example of how the Administration is creating smart partnerships with the private sector to better support Americans in all parts of the country.

About USDA's Rural Business Investment Program (RBIP)

The Rural Business Investment Program promotes economic development in mostly rural areas by helping to meet the equity capital investment needs of smaller enterprises in such areas. USDA licenses newly formed for-profit investment fund entities as Rural Business Investment Companies (RBICs). RBICs use the equity raised in capitalizing their fund to make equity and equity-like investments mostly in smaller enterprises located primarily in rural areas.

About the Farm Credit System

For nearly a century, Farm Credit has been a national provider of credit and related services to rural America through its cooperative network of customer-owned lending institutions. Farm Credit provides more than $200 billion in loans and leases to farmers, ranchers, rural homeowners, aquatic producers, timber harvesters, agribusinesses, and agricultural and rural utility cooperatives. For more information about the Farm Credit System, please visit www.farmcredit.com.

About Advantage Capital Partners

Advantage Capital Partners is a growth capital and small business finance firm focused on providing growth capital and other investments supporting state and local economic development efforts. The firm's typical forms of investment include venture, expansion equity, mezzanine financing, senior and subordinated loans and government-guaranteed lending. With offices and partners in New Orleans, St. Louis, Chicago and other U.S. cities, Advantage Capital has invested more than $1.6 billion since 1992. The firm invests in small businesses across a wide range of industries that are located in geographic areas underserved by traditional sources of capital.

EPA Releases Top 25 List of Cities with Most Energy Star Buildings

Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, New York, San Francisco make top five, cutting energy costs while increasing efficiency, protecting health, reducing pollution

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 10, 2014
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WASHINGTON – Today, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the sixth annual list of the top 25 U.S. metropolitan areas with the most Energy Star certified buildings. The cities on this list demonstrate the economic and environmental benefits achieved by facility owners and managers when they apply a proven approach to energy efficiency to their buildings.

The Top 10 cities on the list are: Los Angeles; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; New York; San Francisco; Chicago; Dallas; Denver; Philadelphia; and Houston.

"Not only are the Energy Star top 25 cities saving money on energy costs and increasing energy efficiency, but they are promoting public health by decreasing greenhouse gas emissions from commercial buildings," said Administrator Gina McCarthy. "Every city has an important role to play in reducing emissions and carbon pollution, and increasing energy efficiency to combat the impacts of our changing climate."

Energy use in commercial buildings accounts for 17 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions at a cost of more than

$100 billion per year. Energy Star certified office buildings cost $0.50 less per square foot to operate than average office buildings, and use nearly two times less energy per square foot than average office buildings.

The data also show that more than 23,000 buildings across America earned EPA's Energy Star certification by the end of 2013. These buildings saved more than $3.1 billion on utility bills and prevented greenhouse gas emissions equal to the annual electricity use from 2.2 million homes.

First released in 2008, the list of cities with the most Energy Star certified buildings continues to demonstrate how cities across America, with help from Energy Star, are embracing energy efficiency as a simple and effective way to save money and prevent pollution. Los Angeles has remained the top city since 2008 while Washington, D.C. continues to hold onto second place for the fifth consecutive year. Atlanta moved up from the number five to number three. For the first time, Philadelphia entered the top 10, ranking ninth.

Commercial buildings that earn EPA's Energy Star must perform in the top 25 percent of similar buildings nationwide and must be independently verified by a licensed professional engineer or a registered architect. Energy Star certified buildings use an average of 35 percent less energy and are responsible for 35 percent less carbon dioxide emissions than typical buildings. Many types of commercial buildings can earn the Energy Star, including office buildings, K-12 schools, hotels, and retail stores.

Products, homes and buildings that earn the Energy Star label prevent greenhouse gas emissions by meeting strict energy efficiency requirements set by the U.S. EPA. In 2013 alone, Americans, with the help of Energy Star, saved an estimated $30 billion on their utility bills and prevented greenhouse gas emissions equal to the annual electricity use of more than 38 million homes. From the first Energy Star qualified computer in 1992, the Energy Star label can now be found on products in more than 70 different categories, with more than 4.5 billion sold. Over 1.5 million new homes and 23,000 commercial buildings and industrial plants have earned the Energy Star label.

The 2014 Energy Star Top Cities are:

1. Los Angeles
2. Washington, DC
3. Atlanta
4. New York
5. San Francisco
6. Chicago
7. Dallas-Fort Worth
8. Denver
9. Philadelphia
10. Houston
11. Charlotte
12. Phoenix
13. Boston
14. Seattle
15. San Diego
16. Minneapolis-St. Paul
17. Sacramento
18. Miami
19. Cincinnati
20. San Jose
21. Columbus, Ohio
22. Riverside, Calif.
23. Detroit
24. Portland, Ore.
25. Louisville

More on the 2013 top cities: www.energystar.gov/topcities

More on Energy Star certified buildings: www.energystar.gov/buildinglist

More about earning the Energy Star label for commercial buildings: www.energystar.gov/labeledbuildings

THE VALUE OF RECOGNIZING THAT SAMENESS IS THE ENEMY OF INNOVATION.

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