

Questions for the Record from Senator Wicker to Mr. Donald Cravins, Jr

Question 1: In June 2018, the MBDA awarded nearly \$2 million in grants to four Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). These grants allowed HBCUs to increase their ability to compete for and receive Federal research and development funds, establish partnerships with Federal laboratories and other technology resources, increase STEM entrepreneurship, and compete for Federal contracts. At NOAA, for example, none of the agency's 19 cooperative institutes is at an HBCU.

- Mr. Cravins, I have been working with Federal agencies to increase participation of HBCUs in federal research programs. I am particularly concerned with the fact that none of NOAA's Cooperative Research institutes are located at an HBCU. The MBDA has a history of working with HBCUs to increase their ability to compete for Federal research and development funds.
- Will you commit to continue working with me to ensure that Federal research agencies are working with HBCUs?

Answer: *Yes. Research on Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs) is sorely lacking and HBCUs, as well as other Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) can play an important role in working with federal research agencies, including MBDA, in closing this gap. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and your team on this issue.*

Question 2: The MBDA has previously worked with the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to share knowledge and develop strategies to increase the number of minority businesses participating in NIST programs, services, and contracting opportunities. NIST's mission is to develop and promote measurements, standards, and technology to enhance productivity, facilitate trade, and improve the quality of life. NIST runs both the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program (MEP), and the Manufacturing USA institutes.

Mr. Cravins, what role do you see NIST and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) network playing in supporting minority businesses? How can the MBDA help identify those small-to-mid sized minority businesses that could benefit from the MEP programs and services?

Answer: *If confirmed, I look forward to working with fellow Commerce bureaus on advancing MBE and minority entrepreneurs' interests. Through MBDA's existing programs, the Agency works with many MBEs, including those in manufacturing. MBDA also has a number of Specialty Centers focused on providing technical assistance to MBEs in advanced manufacturing.*

Questions for the Record from Senator Blackburn to Mr. Donald Cravins, Jr

Question 1: The Covid-19 pandemic took a significant toll on small businesses across the country. Through no fault of their own, many of them did not survive and were forced to close. Fortunately, we have seen a resurgence, with many people shifting careers to take a step towards entrepreneurship. However, not all places are experiencing this. In low-income, rural areas, it is increasingly hard for entrepreneurs to get the support they need to get their businesses off the ground.

- How do you plan to ensure minority business owners in rural America receive the help they need?
- How can Congress best support and reach entrepreneurs in low-income areas?

Answer: *As I mentioned in my opening testimony, rural communities are very important to me as someone who grew up in rural south Louisiana. You are absolutely correct that low-income communities were, and still are, disproportionately impacted by the economic toll of the pandemic and, in many ways, are precisely a community of entrepreneurs that MBDA is positioned to help uplift. The MBDA Act provides a clear framework for how this Committee expects MBDA to expand its presence in rural communities, which includes the creation of Rural Business Centers across the country by partnering with Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) as well as regional offices to provide direct assistance to areas that need tailored support to fit their community needs. If confirmed, I will work with you and your colleagues to secure the necessary funding and ultimately implement these important tenants of the MBDA Act.*

Finally, I plan to listen. I would like to hear directly from rural communities about what more MBDA can be doing to support them, hear from MBDA career staff about what they think should be done, hear from you and your colleagues about what more MBDA can do to make itself more accessible to communities.

To best serve low-income entrepreneurs, I implore Congress to engage with the MBDA to provide much needed resources and support to their local MBEs, MSIs, and MBCs, and also request appropriations funding that aligns with the MBDA Act's authorization.