

MEA: Let's talk about MED Week, which will be in September. How long has it been going on and what happens during this event?

LANGSTON: MED Week started under the administration of Ronald Reagan, so we just got through its 21st year. An ideal MED week is when we have well over 1,000 to 1,500 participants there, where we have great speakers like Secretary [Colin] Powell, who talks about minority business and the global economy, reaching out to emerging nations as a great noble cause... the vice president of the United States talking about the importance of small business and emerging business; the secretary of commerce's famous quote at MED Week that most of the great small business success stories that he's met have started their businesses in their garage. So he wants everybody to own a garage. The message being I want more small businesses and entrepreneurs and minority businesses to start. Andy Card, the [White House] chief of staff, talks about the president's vision about moving the numbers and an ownership society. All these things were said at the Minority Enterprise Development Conference.

It's a conference where you can acknowledge people, our national winners, our outstanding entrepreneur of the year, our outstanding female entrepreneur, our outstanding manufacturer. Or I can identify people, for historical purposes, for Legacy awards, where I recognized Dr. Leon Sullivan one



THE 3 KEYS TO ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS

Access to capital.

Education and its financial literacy.

Technology, participating in e-commerce and benefiting from the technology.

year, Jack Kemp the second year and Harriet Michel the third year. Where I had the privilege of bringing in the son of WEB Du Bois, introduced by George Haley, the brother of Alex Haley, author of *Roots*. I mean, that's an ideal MED Week, where you can learn, where we have substantive information. We've had Alvin Toffler, the great futurist, who wrote *Future Shock*. He came and talked to us for three hours about the future and how minority businesses have a role in the future in the United States' economy and how this whole demographic of the globe is changing, and how America has to adapt to this change. That was said at MED Week.

MEA: I am a small business owner, my garage is full of activity and I want to break out of my garage. If I go to MED Week, what can I expect?

LANGSTON: You can expect to meet some of the best and brightest minority business enterprises in the world. You can expect to have opportunities to network and conduct social capital with some of those same minority business enterprises. You can expect to have information that will provide technical and managerial assistance. You will hear discussions about access to capital, financial diversity. There will be workshops on contracting with the government, reaching out to the private sector, on building and strengthening your business. Over the years, there have been various workshops or forums that help educate minority businesses. It's the furthest thing from a party; it's really substantive information that people can take back with them, a lot of take-aways, a lot of knowledge is exchanged. And then you would go back to your regions...our business development centers, who will provide the grassroots, on-hand technical and managerial assistance. But most importantly, it brings together each year from across the country minority business enterprises who want to be engaged in enhancing business enterprise in the United States who want to be successful.

MEA: What is this year's theme?

LANGSTON: "Back to the Future: Minority Business Enterprise, the National Priority." We really believe that minority business enterprise is the priority. We want to educate America, the Congress that we must have success for minority business enterprises. They must be successful in this global economy as we grow. That's why I'm so proud that the president of the United States heard that message and he requested a 20 percent increase in our budget for fiscal year '05. That sent the right message at the right time.

MEA: President Bush requested \$5.6 million more for MBDA. What will you do with the increase?

LANGSTON: We're going to make an assessment of how to take advantage of that increase and go where we need to go to get the full return on investment. For example, we went to



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National Minority Enterprise Development (MED) Week 2004 Conference
“Forward to the Future: Minority Business Enterprise – The National Priority”

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Gary, Ind. we want to stay in Gary, Ind. People have forgotten about Gary, wrote Gary off. I didn't. I sent them some money. People wrote off Arkansas. I invested in Arkansas. I'm going to go where the pockets of opportunity are. We're going to go to Mississippi. We're going to reach out to more historically black colleges and minority serving institutions. We're going to try to be in the Carolinas, where we have not been a presence. We have five regions; I'm gonna try to make a business case for seven regions so we can make the regions a little smaller. We want to strengthen our district office in Boston. We want to focus our attention on Pacific Islanders, Hawaiian Islanders. They have been neglected; they have been out there in the Pacific and disconnected. We want to connect them

MEA: What else would you want entrepreneurs to know about this office?

LANGSTON: We want them to know that we do exist. That our services are essentially free. If you are a very high-income successful minority business, we may want you to make a contribution fee to us [laughter] but for the most part, there's no charge. We want them to see themselves, as a minority population, as going into business. We want them to see their children as going into business. And if we can provide you with technical and managerial assistance, but mainly knowledge, just mainly knowledge, about what centers to go into... On our web site, MBDA.gov, there's a virtual business link that talks about how to write a business plan, how to be a start-up. There's information on how to do financial management. There's a lot of

All Photos Clarence Brown

information that's user friendly on the web that they can just print out and go back to and back to... We want them to recognize that in America we're great because we make things. And we can't lose that, particularly in the minority communities. And especially, I would say, in those communities that have not been as competitive, like the African American or certain pockets of Hispanic community.

But I'm optimistic. I'm so optimistic because I've seen great people, I've seen young people who share in our youth entrepreneurship program, kinds come with new ideas. I mean this one young gentleman who picked up the garbage that no one else wanted and got his homies together and did their recycling; and made money. Now the city of New York is talking about wanting to go into business with them. There's a 13-year old young lady...making \$50,000 doing web design; 13 years old. I didn't see \$50,000 until I was in my 30s. And so I'm excited about that. I'm excited about these guys in the music industry, the hip-hop guys; these guys are, ironically, pretty conservative businessmen and women. They know the numbers, even more so than the athletes. They know what it takes; and they're not engaged in conspicuous consumption. They're reinvesting; they're reinvesting in clothes; reinvesting in retail, in textiles; getting their labels...linking with other strategic partners. It's nice to see that. It reminds me of what I read about the Harlem Renaissance period; their rebuilding in our communities.

We want to partner with like, HUD, so these young boys in particular can start rebuilding America's inner cities and rural areas. The HUD Section 3 program has an entrepreneurial training program. Go back to the old tech schools, where you know, everyone's not going to go to college. But they certainly can learn a building trade, apprenticeship trade, so linking with the great secretary-designate of HUD, Alphonso Jackson, I'm very proud to be linking with him to do this kind of entrepreneurship apprenticeship program to train young guys how to rebuild homes, how do electrical wiring. Isn't that great?

So the cup is half full. I'm a positive brother. We have challenges; I'm not naive. I'm not in doubt about our legacy. It is what it is; so what? We'll move on.



Ronald Langston, Sunny Ezeji and Debra Williams discuss MBDA's new web site