

firms to discuss a safety and health program under development.

Small firms are also witnessing more agency compliance assistance once regulations are in effect. Agencies are routinely providing compliance guides and lists of telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for small business assistance.

And the law provides for a national ombudsman and 10 regional regulatory fairness boards to make it simple for small businesses to share their ideas, experiences, and concerns about the regulatory enforcement environment. The ombudsman and boards are addressing many concerns expressed by small firms in dealing with regulating agencies.

Expanding Technology and Innovation

Initiatives like the Small Business Innovation Research Program, the Small Business Technology Transfer Program, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Manufacturing Extension Partnership and Advanced Technology Program were put in place in the 1980s to channel more Federal funding to small business research and to help small businesses move ideas from the drawing board to the marketplace. Clearly, progress has been made; much remains to be done. New Internet-based initiatives like the Access to Capital Electronic Network and the U.S. Business Advisor are designed to help many more small businesses make the connections they need to commercialize their innovative technologies.

Enhancing International Trade and Federal Procurement Opportunities

During my Administration, our Nation has led the way in opening new markets, with 240 trade agreements that remove foreign barriers to U.S.-made products. Measures aimed at helping small firms expand into the global market have included an overhaul of the Government's export controls and reinvention of export assistance. These changes have cleared a path for small businesses to enter the international economy.

To make certain that small companies can do business with the Government, my Administration and the Congress have streamlined the Federal procurement process through administrative changes and the Federal Acquisition Reform Act of 1996. The changes instituted in these reforms are cost-effective for the Government and are intended to enable businesses to compete more effectively for Government contracts worth billions of dollars.

I am pleased that the SBA has instituted a new electronic gateway to procurement information, the Procurement Marketing and Access Network, or Pro-Net. This database on small, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses will serve as a search engine for contracting officers, a marketing tool for small firms, and a link to procurement opportunities.

The Human Factor

My Administration is moving to anticipate 21st century demands on our

most important resource—our people. As a recent report by the SBA's Office of Advocacy points out, small businesses employed more people on public assistance in 1996 than did large businesses. Our Welfare to Work Partnership has already had positive results—we've moved two million Americans off welfare two full years ahead of schedule. And we are enlisting the help of more and more small business people to expand that record of success.

We want to educate and train a work force that will meet all our future global competition. For those in the work force or moving into it, I recently signed legislation that consolidated the tangle of training programs into a single grant program so that people can move quickly on their own to better jobs and more secure futures. The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 encourages employers to provide training for their employees by excluding income spent on such training from taxation. The SBA has also increased training opportunities for businesses by funding new export assistance centers and women's business centers across the country.

Women have been starting their own businesses at a dramatic rate in recent years. More than 6 million women-owned proprietorships were in operation in 1994, a phenomenal 139 percent increase over the 2.5 million that existed in 1980. But it is also women who are most affected by the lack of adequate child care. The SBA's Office of Advocacy has found that while small firms value the benefits of child care as much as large businesses, small businesses have been less likely to offer this benefit than large firms for a variety of reasons related to cost. The bottom line is that we've got to raise the quality of child care and make it more affordable for families. I have proposed tax credits for businesses that provide child care and a larger child care tax credit for working families.

I am pleased that so many Americans of all races and nationalities are asserting their economic power by starting small businesses. This report documents the growth: the number of businesses owned by minorities increased from 1.2 million to almost 2 million in the 5-year period from 1987 to 1992. The Federal Government has a role in widening the circle of economic opportunity. Programs are in place to ensure that socially and economically disadvantaged businesses have a fair chance in the Federal procurement marketplace. The share of Federal contract dollars won by minority-owned firms has remained at 5.5 percent for two years running—up from less than 2 percent in 1980. And recently the SBA and the Vice President announced new small business lending initiatives directed to the Hispanic and African American small business communities to give these Americans better access to the capital they need.

We have been working for the past 5 years to bring the spark of enterprise to inner city and poor rural areas through community development

banks, commercial loans in poor neighborhoods, and the cleanup of polluted sites for development. The empowerment zone and enterprise community program offers significant tax incentives for firms within the zones, including a 20-percent wage credit and another \$20,000 in expensing and tax-exempt facility bonds. Under the leadership of the Vice President, we want to increase the number of empowerment zones to give more businesses incentives to move into these areas.

Future Challenges

America's small business community is both the symbol and the embodiment of our economic freedom. That is why my administration has made concerted efforts to expand small business access to capital, reform the system of Government regulations to make it more equitable for small companies, and expand small business access to new and growing markets.

This is an important report because it annually reflects our current knowledge about the dynamic small business economy. Clearly, much is yet to be learned: existing statistics are not yet current enough to answer all the questions about how small, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses are faring in obtaining capital, providing benefits, and responding to regional growth or downsizing. I continue to encourage cooperative Government efforts to gather and analyze data that is useful for Federal policymaking.

I am proud that my Administration is on the leading edge in working as a partner with the small business community. Our economic future deserves no less. The job of my Administration, and its pledge to small business owners, is to listen, to find out what works and to ensure a healthy environment for small business growth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON.

THE WHITE HOUSE, May 6, 1999.

By unanimous consent, the message, together with the accompanying papers, was referred to the Committee on Small Business.

¶45.23 LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted—

To Mr. BEREUTER, for today after 3:30 p.m.;

To Mr. KUYKENDALL, for today;

To Mr. BLILEY, for today after 3 p.m.;

To Mr. TIAHRT, for today;

To Mr. McNULTY, for today; and

To Mr. PACKARD, for today after 3:30 p.m..

And then,

¶45.24 ADJOURNMENT

On motion of Mr. WELDON of Pennsylvania, pursuant to the special order heretofore agreed to, at 9 o'clock and 35 minutes p.m., the House adjourned until 2 o'clock p.m. on Monday, May 10, 1999.