

The Minority Business Development Agency is a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce. It was started during the Richard Nixon Administration. President Nixon gave a lot of attention to minority affairs. Along with this, he allowed Dr. Arthur A. Fletcher to implement Affirmative Action. The President was proud of this new agency and adequately funded it.

The MBDA had regional offices throughout the nation and issued grants to dozens of consulting groups to provide technical assistance to minority businesses. They would assist in financial packaging, procurement, business planning and networking. In the beginning most of these grantees were Black owned firms. They were very aggressive and popular throughout the Black business network.

Things started going in reverse during the Reagan Administration. The funding was cut by two thirds. The MBDA started downsizing to the point of irrelevancy. It was during the George Herbert Bush administration that a study was commissioned to find out what changes could be made to reinvigorate the MBDA. My friend and minority business advocate, Joshua Smith, was appointed president of the commission. They held meetings around the nation taking valuable testimony from businesses and government officials. I remember going to Chicago to give my testimony. The final report was comprehensive and encouraged the government to transfer the 8a minority business program from the Small Business Administration to the MBDA. Joshua felt there would be better service if the MBDA could manage the 8a program and receive their ample funding.

We all awaited the President's response and looked forward to the upcoming changes. It never came! President Bush refused to read it. However, the SBA read it and became enraged. They sought revenge. Joshua Smith's main company was in the 8a program. The SBA kicked his company out of the program overnight and caused severe financial harm to this thriving Black owned firm. This was a very disgusting moment in Black business history. The 8a program stayed with the SBA and has been withering on the "vine" ever since.

A new chance of hope came when William J. Clinton was inaugurated. He appointed the great Ron Brown as Secretary of Commerce. Ron was a legend in political leadership and entrepreneurship. He knew how to play the "game" and never forgot where he came from – Harlem, NY. He pledged to get the funding back into MBDA and technical support would rise to a new level. However, our hopes were dashed when he died in that infamous and mysterious airplane crash over Europe. With his unexpected departure went any hope of renewing the budget levels. There would never be afterwards a Secretary who would be as committed to

making the MBDA, once again, effective.

I read the federal manual covering the Department of Commerce and viewed the entire mission and commitment of the MBDA. In the explanation it stated that the MBDA offices and grantees (Minority Business Development Centers) would work actively with minority chambers of commerce. This was 1994 and we had just set up our national office in Washington, DC. I got excited and wrote Courtney Cox, the Director of the MBDA at that time. There was no response. Soon I learned that the language regarding working with minority chambers of commerce had been taken out. Wow, as soon as we get a national network of Black chambers they renege on their commitment.

Now we are at the beginning of the George W. Bush administration. The Clinton Administration never increased the budget of MBDA and my hopes during the new administration would be just to hold on to what we have. Things didn't get better at the MBDA but we did maintain the budget.

The above proved to be rocky times but the Obama Administration would become the worst in history. The budget has not been increased but slashed even more to the point of being dysfunctional. The regional offices are being cut in half. The grantees (Minority Business Development Centers) are far and in between with most of them not being Black nor targeted to Black owned businesses. The procurement dollars and financing they report are suspect at best as there is no auditing documentation to support their claims.

The final insult is there will be no more Annual Med Week events. For 29 years there would be a big networking event of minority firms and the MBDA plus the SBA. The 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary will not be. As opposed to a week of events in September, they are having a day and a half in December and the SBA will not be attending. It is just a token of what this large event used to be. Last year they had 57 sponsors. This year there will be only 19. The operation is a mere shadow of the agency once touted by Presidents.

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