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United States Senate

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April 29, 2011

The Honorable Karen G. Mills
Administrator
U.S. Small Business Administration
409 Third Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20416

Dear Administrator Mills:

As you may know, the Louisiana side of the Mississippi River Delta is one of the most economically distressed areas in the United States. The Louisiana Delta Region (including the parishes of East Carroll, Madison, Tensas, Concordia, Catahoula, Franklin and Richland) has been identified as the poorest cluster of parishes in Louisiana. As of the 2000 Census, the average family poverty rate in this area was more than 26 percent. For this reason, I write to you regarding improving U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) outreach in this area.

In particular, it is my understanding that on April 22, 2010 the SBA and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to better coordinate programs to assist small businesses in underserved rural areas. This MOU set a goal to increase the number of small business loans guaranteed by SBA and USDA, as well as to expand technical assistance efforts in these areas. Another area covered by the MOU relates to semiannual meetings between SBA District Directors (or designees) and their Rural Development counterpart. Louisiana is one of seventeen (17) states covered by this MOU.

Furthermore, on November 12, 2010 SBA was one of nine (9) Federal agencies that signed an MOU with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). This MOU established the Appalachian Regional Development Initiative, with short term goals to assist immediate capacity needs and long-term goals to build new funding strategies for a variety of projects in the region. As part of a kick off for implementing the MOU, a series of technical workshops were held in Appalachia to assist communities in accessing new funding to spur economic growth. I applaud the efforts of SBA to partner with local organizations to facilitate and support the development of strong rural businesses. For this reason, I request that the SBA enter into a similar MOU with the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). The DRA covers 252 counties/parishes in parts of eight (8) states, including the Louisiana Delta Parishes. An MOU could better coordinate SBA programs in these rural areas, particularly as it relates to supporting community and regional

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development efforts as well as in identifying strategic initiatives/partnerships.

In closing, I respectfully request an update on SBA-USDA special projects conducted under the auspices of the agencies' MOU in Louisiana. I also would appreciate any additional information you can provide on recent SBA activities in the Louisiana Delta Parishes. Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions to enhance SBA's programs in the Louisiana Delta Parishes. For my part, I remain committed to ensuring that SBA has sufficient resources and tools necessary to provide effective assistance for small businesses and communities in these rural areas of my state.

Sincerely,



Mary L. Landrieu
Chair

MLL:brv