

**Opening Statement of Maria Contreras-Sweet**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship**  
**February 12, 2014**  
**Remarks as prepared for delivery**

Thank you. Chair Landrieu, Ranking Member Risch, Senator Cantwell, members of the committee, I am deeply honored to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee for the position of Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

Let me thank you and your staff for putting together this hearing so quickly and the kindness you and your teams have shown me in this confirmation process. I want to extend my sincere appreciation to Senator Feinstein for her warm introduction. I am grateful for the support of both my home-state senators.

I also want to express my sincere appreciation to my husband Ray, my children, Antonio, Francesca and Rafael and my extended family. Their love and support means so much to me. They are my bedrock and motivation for everything I do.

President Obama has made small business a priority since the day he stepped into office. He elevated the role of SBA Administrator to Cabinet-level. He understands small business. The work of Administrator Karen Mills and Deputy Administrator Marie Johns, as well as the stewardship of Acting Administrator Jeanne Hult has resulted in a stronger, more effective agency. SBA's record levels of lending helped pull us out of one of the nation's worst economic periods and the agency has streamlined and simplified many processes, reduced paperwork and become more customer-oriented than ever before. If confirmed, I will strive to build on that record.

I have over 25 years of management and executive experience in both the public and private sector that I would bring to this post, if confirmed. My background and experiences as an entrepreneur, as a government official and as a corporate executive give me a unique perspective into lessons learned that I can put to good use helping small business owners create new products and expand their businesses.

I am a small business owner whose small business helps small businesses every day.

ProAmerica Bank is a Latino-owned business bank in California and it started just like so many small businesses do: from the ground up; with support from the community, my friends and family.

We ensure that entrepreneurs can access the financing they need to contribute to the economy, create jobs, and provide for their families.

Earlier, when I started my first business, I experienced the same challenges entrepreneurs face today. I wore many hats and poured my heart and soul into that business. As California's Cabinet Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing, I made sure small businesses were integrated and involved in the state's procurement process and we made progress on those goals every year.

I enjoy bringing people together, building bridges and finding ways to solve problems and create opportunities. I am honored that so many small business advocates, community organizations and friends from my past are here today and look forward to working with them and others on public-private partnerships to help America's entrepreneurs.

When I moved to California from Mexico as a child I saw my mother work long hours to support me and my brothers and sisters. I experienced first-hand the challenges working families and recent immigrants are facing. My record of fighting for women and families stems from these experiences, and if confirmed, I will continue that mission.

We have a saying at the bank: "construyendo patrimonios." Translated in English, it means "building a family legacy." That's what small businesses are: they are family legacies. It's about family pride and supporting their community. It is what the American Dream is all about.

I am a very proud American and proud of all that America means to her citizens and to the world. If confirmed, I will work closely with you, your colleagues in the House and Senate, and President Obama to make the U.S. Small Business Administration an even more significant force in expanding the opportunities for all Americans and ensuring the economic strength of our country and the global economy.

Once again, thank you for this hearing. And thank you for your leadership Chair Landrieu. I look forward to working with you Senator Cantwell and Ranking Member Risch. I am happy to take your questions.

###