

April 16, 2014

Welcome to Vancouver, I am Eric Sawyer, Chair Elect of the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce and a local business leader.

I wish to thank you Chair Cantwell and members of the committee for holding your field hearing in Vancouver today.

It's a tremendous opportunity to share with you the experiences of small businesses in this community and to outline how you can help us gain access to funding in support of growing small businesses.

When I'm not representing the GVCC I am an Area Manager for BBSI. BBSI's purpose is to advocate for small business owners. We work hand in hand with the very same businesses that the Chamber puts me in front of, the small business owner, the entrepreneur. In both roles I have the honor of seeing first- hand what business owners experience every day. Working with over 3,000 small companies, we know that every entrepreneur who starts their own business has three unique qualities about them....They have a job they can't quit, they're the last person to get paid, and they have everything

they own invested in their dream. That's the entrepreneur in a nutshell. Sounds great doesn't it, sign me up. But without the tenacity, grit and vision of these business owners, our country and our economic landscape would look radically different. Where you or I might see a road of discomfort and challenge, the business owner sees opportunity.

The Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce represents 1,000 businesses in SW Washington which includes 45,000 employees.

As you know our community was struck hard by the 2008 recession. Our local economy relied heavily on construction. The fall of the real estate market was devastating to local builders and related businesses.

We also experienced a local bank failure. The problem was compounded because the FDIC did not require the assuming bank to pick up the performing loans. As a result, all businesses banking with that institution were left without financial resources, regardless of their performances. Even those with good credit and financial stability couldn't get loans at other banks because the country was in the throes of the financial crisis. Times in SW Washington have been bleak. We are just now experiencing a modest but sustained recovery

You ask, how are we doing now? Do we have access to capital? Yes and no.

Banks are advertising opportunities now, and we've heard the credit market for small business is opening up. They're requiring excellent credit, proof of performance, well documented financials, business plans and marketing strategies. Small and/or new businesses find it difficult to get loans.

Business owners are willing to do that work if it means access to credit. As an entrepreneur you put everything you have into the game. And that often times puts your personal credit at risk, regardless of current business stability and performance. Then when your business is thriving but you need capital to support it or expand it, you get turned down by the banks because your personal credit isn't strong enough.

Summing up those two main points; better education for the business owner, and lending guidelines that are more practical while maintaining stringent policies.

We're grateful for the help of business advocates such as the Small Business Administration through its SCORE program, SBDC program and the regional SBA office.

Here in Vancouver however, we tend to feel a bit removed between Portland and Seattle. We are served by our Portland Oregon office. We appreciate the outreach they've done to connect with our small businesses. But our business owners have a hard time getting out of their offices to drive to Portland for workshops and meetings. At the Chamber, we'd like to help facilitate that connection. We invite the SBA to hold field office hours here in Vancouver once a month at our chamber offices where we have plenty of meeting space. Our busy businesses need 'one stop shopping'. That's why we're creating a small business resource center for businesses at the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce.

We see tremendous opportunity for the SBA; first, in helping small businesses more successfully access the credit market through education and guidance. Second, when the SBA plays the role of lender, we urge you to review each business' financials with consideration for what we all know about the small business owner: they put everything on the line, they get paid last, they can't quit, AND they are the backbone of our economy.