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By James W. Wade III
Staff Reporter

President Barack Obama came to Cleveland to meet and talk to about 100 small business owners at Cleveland State University Wolstein Center. The White House tagged the event as a “Winning the Future Forum on Small Business.”

The president opened by introducing his special guests who included the SBA administrator Karen Mills along with members of his cabinet Secretary of the Treasury Tim Geithner, Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, Secretary of Energy Steve Chu, Mr. Austan Goolsbee, who is his chairman of the Economic Council, and his director of the National Economic Council Gene Sperling.

The president said many small business owners complained that they need more readily available capital. The president said his administration has increased guarantees to banks hesitant to loan money to small businesses and addressed an idea raised in one session that would give tax breaks to “angel investors” willing to help small businesses.

“I did not come to Cleveland to talk,” Obama said during his speech. “Instead, I came here to listen.”

Obama also gave a special thank you to Steve Case, who is not only an extraordinary entrepreneur and business leader, who has agreed to chair the Startup America partnership – a public/private partnership to help move the entrepreneurship agenda forward

“It is wonderful to be back in Ohio and we’re going to do something a little different today. I did not come to Cleveland to talk. Instead I came here to listen. I’ve spent the last month since the State of the Union sharing my vision for an America that remains the best place on Earth to do business. An America that competes aggressively for every job and every industry that’s out there. An America that wins the future,” Obama said.

The president stressed “this is a working session, not a photo op.”

Obama made it clear that “when small businesses do well, we do well.”

The president wanted to hear directly from business owners about how to stimulate the economy, put Americans back to work, and win the future.

Obama delivered opening and closing remarks at the forum. In between, there were be breakout sessions - some of which the president participated in - hosted by cabinet members. Topics included:

• Entrepreneurship

• Access to Capital and Tax Breaks for Small Businesses

• Workforce Development

• Exports

• Clean Energy

In his closing remarks, Obama summarized what he had been hearing during the sessions with small business owners. He said his administration has increased guarantees to banks hesitant to loan money to small businesses and addressed an idea raised in one session that would give tax breaks to “angel investors” willing to help small businesses.

The president noted successes of a few small Northeast Ohio businesses including flexible electronic products maker Kent Displays Inc., located just south of Kent, fuel cell maker Ashlawn Energy of Painesville and Miceli Dairy Products of Cleveland as examples of companies that will help the American economy grow.

“It’s stories like yours and it’s places like Cleveland that make me absolutely confident we’re going to be able to do that,” Obama said.

Darrell McNair, CEO of MVP Plastics, Inc., was one of the 100 local small business owners who got a chance to talk with the president face-to-face.

“We hope to get some true action items coming out of the meeting,” said McNair. “We’ve heard the rhetoric before, regarding ‘we need to stimulate small businesses,’ but quite frankly, small

businesses have not seen that stimulus."

McNair represented The Presidents' Council, an organization made up of the 16 largest African-American owned businesses in Northeast **Ohio** employing about 1,100 people.

"While banks and auto makers got bailouts, the little guys have been left to fend for themselves. It's been a tough go the last couple of years," McNair said.

Administration officials plan to hold additional forums with small business owners across the country. Sessions are planned for Atlanta, Boston, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis and Silicon Valley as well as Austin, Texas; Durham, N.C., and Boulder, Colorado.