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WASHINGTON - U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke Thursday said the Commerce Department is taking specific and immediate steps to ensure, increase and support access for Black owned businesses and businesses owned by other people of color in the massive federal Recovery Act spending initiative.

Locke, along with Commerce senior advisor Rick Wade, held a conference call with reporters Thursday to discuss the department's commitment to improving outreach and education.

"President Obama is committed to ensuring that minority businesses are aware of and have access to federal contracts and funding opportunities," Locke said. "The success of minority-owned businesses is vital to our economic recovery, and we're working hard to make sure they have access to these important federal opportunities."

Among the specific steps announced were:

- 1) A major national summit to discuss federal opportunities and best practices in minority business programs and services with more than 150 minority business advocates.
- 2) Workshops throughout the country to inform companies about contracting opportunities related to a Recovery Act initiative to bring broadband Internet access to more Americans.
- 3) One-on-one training provided through the Commerce Department's Minority Business Development Agency to minority businesses across the country.
- 4) One-stop-shop Web sites for grant and contract opportunities.

Monday July 6th and Tuesday, July 7, the department's Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), Commerce is hosting a major national summit in Washington, D.C., to discuss best practices in business development programs and services to increase the growth and development of minority businesses. In addition, there will be discussions about grant and contract opportunities that exist within the federal government and the best way to provide this information to minority businesses. More than 150 minority business advocates from across the country will attend this summit. Edward DeSeve, who works in the White House as a special advisor to President Obama, will address attendees.

The Commerce Department also will hold a series of workshops across the country to inform businesses about Recovery Act opportunities relating to a new broadband Internet initiative. The program is designed to reach the last areas that still struggle with obtaining high-speed Internet access. The investments the program makes in inner-city neighborhoods and rural communities will spur innovation and pave the way for private capital to follow.

There are ten upcoming broadband workshops being held coast to coast - in Boston, Mass.; Charleston, W.Va.; Minneapolis, Minn.; Memphis, Tenn.; Lonoke, Ark.; Birmingham, Ala.; Billings, Mont.; Albuquerque, N.M.; and Los Angeles, Calif. More information on these workshops can be found at www.broadbandusa.gov. These workshops are one example of the

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specific outreach efforts that are happening across the country.

Much of the Commerce Department's outreach efforts are organized through MBDA's five regional offices in partnership with a network of approximately 45 minority business centers around the country. These centers offer one-on-one workshops and business consulting services for minority businesses to help educate them about federal opportunities. Recovery Act workshops are held at events and conferences at the local level to reach minority entrepreneurs and educate them about the procurement process specifically related to the Recovery Act. More information about MBDA's local centers and services can be found at www.mbda.gov.

For businesses looking for specific grant and contract opportunities, online tools are already set up to provide that information. There is a vast array of opportunities for both grants and contracts with the federal government - on both a large and smaller scale.

The one-stop-shop for all contracting interests is www.FedBizOpps.gov.

The one-stop-shop for all grant opportunities is www.grants.gov.

At the Department of Commerce, Secretary Locke is charged with helping implement President Obama's ambitious agenda to turn around the economy and put people back to work. His department's Minority Business Development Agency was created specifically to foster the establishment and growth of minority-owned businesses in America.