

Obama to push innovation at Ohio small businesses

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President Barack Obama speaks at the Intel Corporation, Friday, Feb. 18, 2011, in Hillsboro, Ore. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster)

(AP) -- Last week it was Silicon Valley. This week, President Barack Obama is putting the spotlight on the small businesses of America's heartland.

The president and a team from his Cabinet are scheduled to attend a forum Tuesday at Cleveland State University with more than a hundred small business leaders from Northeast Ohio.

White House officials say the forum's goal is to brainstorm with small business leaders about how to boost economic growth through fostering entrepreneurship, expanding exports and advancing [clean energy](#)

[technology](#). The forum also will look at whether small businesses have access to the capital and capable workers that they need to grow.

"The experience of a small business can really give you insight into how we can continue to focus and refine our activities," Small Business Administrator Karen Mills said.

Mills is expected to announce that the administration will hold round-table sessions with small business owners across the country, seeking suggestions on how to reduce obstacles and streamline regulations to encourage innovation. The sessions are planned for Atlanta, Boston, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis and [Silicon Valley](#) as well as Austin, Texas; Durham, N.C., and Boulder, Colo.

Austan Goolsbee, chairman of the president's Council of Economic Advisers, last week solicited ideas for the small business forum in a posting on the White House blog. He said past postings from the public for White House advisers had been "rather colorful" at times - apparently too colorful. "This is going to be a family program in Cleveland, so I encourage you to participate responsibly," he said.

Breakout sessions at the forum include one on access to capital, led by Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner; another on clean energy, led by Energy Secretary Steven Chu; and yet another on exports featuring Commerce Secretary Gary Locke.

Obama has been getting out of Washington each week lately to push his competitiveness agenda. His proposed budget for the coming year would trade cuts in some domestic programs for increases in education, infrastructure and research that he says will help the country compete in the global economy. The administration says small businesses and entrepreneurs are critical to fostering economic growth.

But the president's proposed budget has drawn complaints from Republicans who want much steeper cuts and from small business advocates concerned about Obama's plan to allow the expiration of tax cuts after 2012 for families making more than \$250,000 a year. The National Federation of Independent Business says the change in individual tax rates, which would take effect in two years, would be devastating to the 75 percent of small-business owners who are taxed on business income at the individual rate.

NFIB senior vice president Susan Eckerly said the group welcomes the president's focus Tuesday on small business, saying he's devoted far more attention to big business. But she said the president's budget was "tone-deaf" to the needs of small businesses because it would set the estate tax level too high and allow Bush-era tax cuts to expire.

More information:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/02/16/advise-advisor-austan-goolsbee-and-small-business>

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