

White House Business Council Roundtable held in Mexico

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Photos



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Frank Cordie talks with Jonathan Adelstein and Joe Knaebel, chairman of the board for the Mid Am company in Moberly, about the mechanics of the Mid America Brick operation, and how it came to be – from vision to reality.



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(From left) Mid America Brick President Frank Cordie, Rural Utilities Service Administrator Jonathan Adelstein and MAB Vice President David Adams pause for a moment, shortly after the close of the White House Business Council Roundtable meeting. Tours inside the plant were extended to those attending.

Mexico, Mo. —

Officials from USDA Rural Development met with business leaders in Mexico Wednesday to seek their input on ways federal, state and local officials can help improve economic conditions and create jobs. The meeting was hosted by Frank Cordie, president of Mid America Brick.

"President Obama sent me out here to Mexico, Missouri to hear from local business leaders about how we can help them create more jobs. He knows the jobs are being created outside of Washington by businesses, not by government. So he wants to find out how the government can help these job creators do what they are doing ...

[and] how the government can get out of the way of job creators; these small businesses that are the engines of 2/3 of the new jobs in this country. And, what are some of the regulations we can get rid of," Jonathan Adelstein, administrator of USDA Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service, and a member of the White House Business Council on Winning the Future, told an audience of nearly two dozen area business owners and economic development officials.

"This roundtable is one of many the Obama administration is holding, to get feedback on ways we can help businesses expand and improve the economic base in your area."

Adelstein facilitated the White House Business Council's Roundtable at the start of a three-day tour of Missouri infrastructure and business projects USDA Rural Development has supported. The agency's Rural Business Services program assisted Mid America Brick with financing to help re-energize the brick plant and bring back jobs for the community.

The Rural Utilities Services program funds broadband, safe drinking water, wastewater and electric infrastructure projects to help rural communities create jobs and remain economically competitive with metropolitan areas. While in Missouri this week, Adelstein is touring several RUS funded projects. On Wednesday morning he visited Socket in Columbia to see the progress on a \$23.7 million investment of federal broadband funds to support fiber-to-the-home network in rural Callaway County. This morning, he planned to join Gov. Jay Nixon at Ralls County Electric Cooperative, in New London, to celebrate the construction of an installation of \$19.1 million in broadband services to 4,594 households, 311 business and 58 anchor institutions in northeast Missouri. Later today, he planned stops at Ralls County PWS No. 1 to visit the site of water improvements, a meeting with Barry Hart, CEO of the Association of Missouri Electric Cooperatives and other Electric Coop leaders for dinner, to discuss other infrastructure needs to help rural Missourians.

The tour continues on Friday to three wastewater infrastructure projects in Howard County including: a visit to Fayette's new water plant and wastewater treatment facility plus the Howard County Regional Water Commission that serves three public water systems in southern Howard County and the city of New Franklin, city of Fayette and Howard County PWS No. 1.

USDA is focused on creating 21st century rural communities that encourage innovation, entrepreneurship and are self-sustaining. Adelstein emphasized that USDA is looking to have an exchange of ideas with the business community on ways to create jobs. This exchange also is intended to educate business and community leaders about USDA and other resources the Obama administration has, to assist in this effort.

"I heard from local business leaders about the implicative regulations and excessive paperwork that they have to contend with, and we are committed to taking the message back. The president has given us these worksheets to explain what we learned and what some of the follow-up will be," Adelstein said. "Like there was one individual who had an issue with a federal agency that made it difficult for him to manufacture his product. We are going to take this back and ask for follow-up, so we can help the government get out of the way, and behind those wanting to start a new business like MAB."

Adelstein told The Ledger, "We are 100 percent behind MAB. We think it's an enormous opportunity. We're already seeing a lot of demand for these bricks and he hasn't even finished firing one yet. So we think this is going to work. We wouldn't be putting federal dollars into it unless we were convinced this was a good business."

Following a closed meeting with the area businessmen, Adelstein, along with state and local USDA representatives were given a motorized tour of the facility.

"With the spirit of Frank and the people who are working here, we believe that this business is going to succeed and help revitalize Mexico, so it can continue to thrive into the future.

"Everyone has gotten behind this – the community, business leaders, federal government, private sector, are all backing this deal. He has followed through on everything he said he would do. We are proud to be partnered with Frank and MAB ... and we're going to back it to make it happen," Adelstein said.

Mexico was the first stop Adelstein has made on his rural United States tour. The administrator wants to make

Mexico an example of how the administration is going to help turn around a community, by helping support in any way it can. This is not a "one time deal," Adelstein said, "we want an ongoing dialogue."

"Mexico is speaking and Washington is listening. And, the strongest message is the very existence of this plant. Given the history of Mexico there is a huge opportunity for this plant to expand and grow."

Following Wednesday's meeting and tour, Cordie said: "This is a real honor for the city of Mexico, and a great honor for Mid America Brick. For our community to be able to host one of these White House Business Council meetings, and be the first in the country to do it, is quite a tribute to good old Mexico, Missouri, and I'm proud of it."

Cordie hopes the meeting will open doors to finance, and help get the small businessman where he can hire people. Several local and area business owners attended the meeting, offering "healthy discussions and positive feedback." Healthcare needs and the ability to get financing were the major issues. MAB currently has just under 40 employees. Cordie said he hopes to have his product up and ready to ship in June.

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