

U.S. federal government assists cities in economic recovery

LOS ANGELES, March 22 (Xinhua) -- The U.S. government held an Urban Economic Forum here Thursday in an effort to align U.S. federal resources to help cities tide over the economic downturn.

The White House Business Council and the U.S. Small Business Administration, in partnership with Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's office, held the forum at Loyola Marymount University to discuss support for policies that create private-sector jobs and their ongoing commitment to the next-generation entrepreneurs.

The Urban Economic Forum is a multi-city series forum designed to connect urban entrepreneurs and business owners to the local and national resources and networks, and also to discuss ways to enhance their success.

The forum is focused on promoting small businesses, entrepreneurship, job training, 21st century infrastructure and restoring communities hardest hit by this economic downturn.

The greater metropolitan Los Angeles region is a critical economic anchor not only for California, but also for the entire United States.

At the forum, the government offered several ways to support the economic recovery in Los Angeles.

The California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF), a non-profit organization working to close the state's digital divide, is using Recovery Act investment from the federal government to provide computer, digital literacy and workforce training to low-income communities and other vulnerable populations.

The CETF works with 19 partners statewide, including non-profits that offer job training and career development services for the unemployed and homeless.

It also works with partners from the minority communities such as the Chicana Latina Foundation and Youth Radio to raise awareness of the importance of broadband and ensure that the programs serve California's diverse population, from Hispanic farm workers to seniors in San Francisco's Chinatown.

Los Angeles is one of the most diversified cities in the United States. Small businesses run by Chinese and other ethnic groups play an important role in its economy. However, Asian businesses are usually not active in seeking government help.

David Hinson, national director of Minority Business Development Agency from the U.S. Department of Commerce, told Xinhua it is true that Asian business owners are less willing to go to the government for help. He believed that cultural difference is one reason, and language barrier is another.

Hinson said the government offers many resources to assist businesses run by minorities and the federal government welcomes minorities like Asian Americans to seek help. The government will also make more reach-out programs to help the minority business owners.

The federal government also has a Small Loan Advantage program to provide loans in small amounts for small businesses that are not qualified for conventional credit.

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is working on a new streamlined process for small dollar loans, which will reduce paperwork and make it easier for small businesses to apply.

With the financial support from the federal government, the Recovery Act funded the LA Scholars Youth Employment program, which provides employment opportunities and skill training for LA students.

The "Hire LA Youth" Initiative has created 16,500 jobs for the youth. The Recovery Act also supplied additional funds to programs traditionally funded through the Workforce Investment Act, which targeted programs for employment and training for primarily low-income adults.

The federal government has awarded 16 million dollars to the Port of Los Angeles for its West Basin Railyard project, which will build an intermodal railyard including staging and storage tracks connecting on-dock railyards with the Alameda Corridor and a railyard for a short-line railroad serving major carriers.

A 20-million dollar Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grant has been given to the city to support a loan that will finance up to one third of the costs of a 1.715-billion-dollar light rail line, which is connecting the South Bay Region and Los Angeles airport with major employment centers located in the Westside Region and the downtown area.

Through the Affordable Care Act, approximately 20 million dollars has been invested in community health centers across the greater Los Angeles area to support major health center construction and renovation projects and to expand access to health care services.