

**Testimony of**  
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**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION**  
**A BUREAU OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS**  
**June 16, 2021**

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, distinguished members of the committee; I am honored to come before you today as President Biden's nominee for Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Economic Development. Thank you for the time that you and your staff afforded me to meet with you during the past week. It was engaging and informative. I share your goals of promoting economic development and growth while also seeking to strengthen our nation's economic innovation and global competitiveness.

I would also like to thank Congressman Espaillat for that kind introduction. Several members of my family have joined me today, and I am so glad they are here. My mother (and my late father) are the source of my values toward public service, hard work and love of country. I would also like to acknowledge my brothers, nieces and nephews who challenge me and teach me the meaning of family, understanding, and patience.

The mission of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) is to support distressed communities in building resilient economies. And when strong economic ecosystems are devastated by natural disasters, or even a pandemic, EDA is there to support community-led efforts to rebuild. EDA helps Americans recover from economic challenges and makes critical investments to spur innovation and create economic opportunities for all.

Today, I come before you with a perspective of economic development that has been shaped not only by my personal background but also by professional experience that spans over two decades of work in the public, private and non-profit sector.

I consider myself an embodiment of the American Dream. Growing up, I watched my parents – who immigrated from the Dominican Republic -- journey from working as janitors to opening small businesses to support our family. Experiencing New York City in the 1970s -- the scarcity of jobs, the lack of economic vitality, and the quasi-bankruptcy the city was experiencing -- gave me a unique perspective into how economic disinvestment can devastate a community.

As a girl, I often rose at 4 a.m. to help my father run his bodega in the Bronx, and I refined my math skills by calculating taxes for my mother's Avon sales. My father took his own life when I was 13, during the devastating global economic crisis of the early 1980s. I saw his struggles. I know that business owners often walk a thin line between success and failure, and I know nothing more devastating to an entrepreneur than when their life dream falls apart.

In economic development, every challenge is truly an opportunity. As we work through this pandemic, we are at a unique juncture with the chance to make critical investments in infrastructure, support tomorrow's industries, and prepare our citizens for the workforce of the future. We have the opportunity to put Americans back to work and increase our global competitiveness.

Our economy must be inclusive and generate growth in communities large and small, develop strategies that have social and economic impact, and weave together communities across the country — whether they be urban, suburban, or rural.

Throughout my career, I've had the opportunity to work with diverse communities across the country, from McAllen, Texas to Rockford, Illinois and Wheeling, West Virginia to Wenatchee, Washington and so many others. Supporting these communities has never been more important, and if confirmed, I will be rolling up my sleeves as we rebuild our economy.

If confirmed, I will be, in a sense, returning home. The Department of Commerce is where I have spent the bulk of my time in government. In 2014, former President Obama tapped me to lead the Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), an appointment that was tremendously rewarding to me and close to my heart, given my own family's background in small business. While I was at the MBDA, we cut overhead and moved more of the budget into directly supporting minority business owners with resources such as grants and technical assistance funding. I also served as a Special Advisor to the Under Secretary for the International Trade Administration, where I assisted in the development of policy initiatives geared toward promoting American business and industry across the globe.

It would be a great honor to continue my public service and utilize all that I have learned and experienced in the legislative, policy, and programmatic arena, as well as my ability to lead large organizations toward transformational change and impact. If confirmed, it is my understanding I will also be the first woman of color to hold this position. That, too, would be an immense honor.

I look forward to continuing my American Dream while also inspiring others to achieve their dreams.

This role demands nothing short of excellence, accountability, and measurable outcomes in its execution. I commit to working with all of you and the dedicated and committed career civil servants at EDA to earn the confidence of the American people.

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee thank you again for the opportunity to address you today. I look forward to your questions.