

It's 'Memphis Day' at White House for local business leaders

By Bartholomew Sullivan

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WASHINGTON – Today is “Memphis Day” at the White House.

Obama Administration officials scheduled a four-hour briefing for 28 Memphis-area business leaders – no politicians – to offer guidance but also to engage in an exchange of ideas about what the federal government can do to move the economic agenda forward, according to an administration official speaking on background.

The discussion was informed by a survey completed by the Bluff City business leaders that told the White House they were most interested in workforce development, infrastructure and innovation, the official said.

“How the administration can partner with local communities will be the discussion for today,” Juan R. Self, a founding partner of Self Tucker Architects Inc. in Memphis, said before the session held at the Eisenhower Executive Office Building adjacent to the White House.

Self’s firm has been involved in the design of the FedExForum, the consolidated ground transportation facility at Memphis International Airport and is working on extensive redesign of the National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, which is scheduled to get under way in November.

Calvin Anderson, senior vice president for corporate affairs for BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee said that what Memphis has been able to do in recruiting Mitsubishi and Electrolux, among other firms, in recent years was probably a factor in being solicited for the special treatment.

During a break in the session, Mark Herbison, senior vice president of the Greater Memphis Chamber, said much of the discussion with administration officials focused on developing skills for the prospective new employees of the companies Memphis has recently lured to town.

The administration official said 45 communities will be reached out to in the ongoing effort to talk to job creators. Virginia Beach and Norfolk, Va., the Resource Triangle of North Carolina and Las Vegas preceded Memphis. Columbus, Ohio; Seattle and Detroit are scheduled for next week.

Memphis officials were expected to hear from Mark Doms, the chief economist for the Department of Commerce; David Kappos, undersecretary of Commerce and director of the Patent and Trademark Office; Rachana Bhowmik, deputy assistant to the

president and deputy cabinet secretary; Beth Osborne, deputy assistant secretary for policy at the Department of Transportation; John Fernandez, assistant secretary of Commerce in the Economic Development Administration; and Royse Cloud of Joining Forces, an effort to integrate returning military service members into the economy.

The leaders are expected to leave the session with a business resource guide as well as better access to top administration officials.



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