

Commerce official nominated to head SBA

By Matthew Weigelt

Published on June 26, 2008

Santanu “Sandy” Baruah has been nominated to head the Small Business Administration. Baruah is now assistant secretary of economic development at the Commerce Department. The White House announced the nomination June 25.

In addition to his present post at Commerce, Baruah has served as deputy assistant secretary of economic development there and has been chief of staff at Commerce’s Economic Development Administration.

If confirmed, Baruah would have a lot to do at SBA and little time to do it, lawmakers say.

“The next administrator at the SBA must be ready to offer creative solutions,” said Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), chairman of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee. Kerry said Baruah would have to address programs in the agency “that will actually help women and minorities gain access to federal contracts and loans.”

Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), the committee’s ranking member, said Baruah has to work in tough economic circumstances to help small businesses. “Although Mr. Baruah would serve for only half a year if confirmed, it is crucial that he act expeditiously,” she said.

Despite Baruah's experience, Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-N.Y.), chairwoman of the Small Business Committee, said, “Whoever is confirmed as SBA administrator will have their work cut out for them.”

Steve Preston, the previous SBA administrator, is now secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

“The SBA needs strong leadership to fill the shoes left by Steven Preston, and we’ll review Sandy Baruah’s record carefully to make sure that he is the right person for the job,” Kerry said.