

Black businesses are being excluded from procurement opportunities in the Gulf Rebuilding

Notes from Arnold Baker, chairman, New Orleans Regional Black Chamber

1. The National Guard Jackson Barracks base commander Colonel Douglas Mouton has with great resistance from his peers, the State and the Military spearheaded an effort in response to local outcry for equitable participation in the rebuilding of Jackson Barracks National Guard Base in the lower 9

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New Orleans

. After garnering the support of his superiors they assisted in getting \$1.3 million allocated to facilitate a comprehensive inclusion program for small, local and minority businesses located in the hurricane impacted areas. The Governor's executive order has had to be revised several times to meet the state's laws and is now receiving resistance from Military leaders in Washington

DC

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This project is critical to the recovery of the City and will create an economic generator in the heart of the most ravaged area. The \$200 Million redevelopment project is perfect for the inclusion of small and minority businesses because it is comprised of many small structures and subsequent smaller contracts than other rebuilding projects.

The inclusion program has had to overcome many city and state obstacles delaying the July 2006 start up to only be further delayed now by Military leaders in DC.

2. The Housing Authority of New Orleans since coming under HUD receivership management has been one of the most critical facilitators of black business development in the city, graduating many businesses to competitive private sector status. Since Katrina however, the housing authority has not used its business and construction opportunities to elevate black business activity and prepare the black business community for upcoming work. National

contractors (KB homes and others) were allowed to come in with their own contractors to start the insurance rebuilds of damaged properties and communication with local business development agencies the black chamber being one has been limited. After several meetings with staff and commitments to communicate and share business opportunities with Black Chambers around the state and country have been unmet. Even commitments to advertise business opportunities on their web site have been limited to large nationally competitive contracts.

3. USACE: After meeting with the Corps management and keeping a regular dialog with them we still cannot maintain information flow. Our local chapter is relegated to asking the large national contractors for bid opportunity projects because requests for such information are directed to the limited information on their website. As of the first of the year, even their web site links for bid opportunities are not working. We are unable to get bid, budget and projected business opportunity from the corps. But this also holds true for most other federal and State agencies. It is difficult to direct reinvestment and facilitate business rebuilding plans if we do not have information on the types of opportunities and their timelines.

4. The political battles between the State and the City of New Orleans are hurting black people more than anyone else. A disproportionate number of the 60,000 businesses that closed along the gulf coast were minority businesses. The Vietnamese business organization received a one million dollar grant for tech support and business assistance, the Hispanic chamber was given funding for an emergency business center to assist with business and job placement, 1.6 Billion was allocated for assisting and supporting businesses located along the (MR.GO) industrial canal.

When asked if something can be done for black businesses the reply is always, we cannot do anything specifically for Black people only small businesses in general. The National Black Chamber teamed up with a group of local black businesses, who in their spare time and all parties with their own resources, have worked to create initiatives like bonding assistance programs, regular business outreach sessions to introduce businesses to opportunities and advocacy for blatant anti business practices. The Black Caucus needs to take a leadership role in this issue as well.