

My advocacy days in Indiana were on a roll. Things that Kay and I were learning seasoned us for issues that lie before the Black business community today. One important point was identifying just who allowed the corruption and/or discrimination and designing a plan to address them “point blank”.

We busted Huber, Hunt and Nichols for fronting on the construction of the massive new State Office Building

. The State Office Building Commission, who was actually in on the deception, banned them from state projects for 5 years. That was not a satisfactory punishment in our eyes and we sought justice in other ways. The company was about to receive a contract from the city of St. Louis

for a new hockey arena. Our contacts in

Missouri

approached the Mayor of St. Louis and he cancelled the contract. We had authorities of

McCormack Place

project in

Chicago

bring them onto the “carpet” and issued a severe warning to them to not play any games. The word was going nationally and the management of HH&N knew they had to make peace.

They appealed to State Representative Bill Crawford, a strong ally of our local chamber. He held a reception at the Skyline Club with Mr. Hunt, the CEO of the company, and about 50 Black contractors from Indianapolis. Eventually, general contractor Jimmy Beard went to the microphone and asked the crowd of local Black contractors, “How many of you have ever worked a contract or subcontract for Huber, Hunt and Nichols?” Not one hand went up and the silence was deafening. Mr. Hunt was indeed embarrassed in front of State Representative Crawford who represented the Legislative Black Caucus at this historic event.

Shortly after that event, management of HH&N asked for a meeting. In that meeting they showed me the work they were doing in Cleveland and Atlanta. The projects both had Black project managers and the diversity – use of Black contractors – was very impressive. I asked, “Why don’t you do that here in your hometown?” They responded that Mayor Michael White of Cleveland

demand it and so did Mayor Maynard Jackson of

Atlanta

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Indiana

to change, go change the attitude or position of the Governor’s office. It became clear to me at

that point. These construction companies were following the desires of their clients. Changes would have to come from the Governor's Office – there was the real enemy? HH&N sent a membership check to our chamber a few days after that meeting and we mutually decided to change our relationship.

I organized a group of minority contractors, the United Contractors Association of Indiana, Inc. and had them file a discrimination lawsuit against Governor Evan Bayh. In the suit we entered all the documentation of fronting, straight up discriminatory practices in the construction sector that was perpetrated by state agencies under the Governor's management. The lawsuit was eventually dropped but the message was clear, "Black contractors aren't going to take it anymore".

At the same time, the city of Indianapolis elected a new mayor, Stephen Goldsmith. Mayor Goldsmith called a meeting with me and chamber members. He stated that his office would be an ally of our chamber. All city agencies and the Indianapolis Airport Authority would be as diverse as possible. To prove his sincerity he gave the chamber a contract to audit minority participation at all procurement offices including the airport. We just had a serious war with that airport but his administration was in charge now and that made a great difference. Mayor Goldsmith was a great leader and helped diversify Indianapolis in ways people could not imagine.

Soon, a new basketball arena was to be built. Funding for it was a mixture of both the city and the state legislature. Representative Crawford was Chair of the Budget Committee. He and the mayor got together and decided to give me, now the National Black Chamber of Commerce, a \$100,000 contract to monitor and ensure that the project meets its diversity goals. I would actually be working with Huber, Hunt and Nichols! All goals were exceeded and all Black contractors were paid in full and on time. That was my last direct project in Indianapolis. Kay and I left with a smile as we knew our work and struggles had made a positive difference.

Please remember if you have complaints about a state funded contract, the buck stops at the Governor's office. If it is the city, go after the mayor. Federal funded projects that have a problem are the fault of your congressional offices and the President of the United States. If it is in the private sector, the blame goes to the Chief Executive Officer, CEO. These should be the change agents and hold them accountable.

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