

# Feds abusing small businesses

By Harry C. Alford  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Federal Acquisition Regulation is the bible for federal procurement practices. It is how you do business with agencies and departments of the federal government. Since the advent of contract bundling, you can forget about the FAR.

It has been twisted and turned and has become very much ineffective. Big business is doing what it wants to do, and the federal agencies are, more or less, saying "Yessa Boss." We now have a virtual coup in the procurement practices of the United States Government. Big business, particularly the Military Industrial Complex, is running the operation.

Go over to the Army Corps of Engineers and you will see it for yourself. Halliburton, the current leader of the Military Industrial Complex, is running the show. I mean setting policy; making decisions; assigning the contracts (mostly to itself). The contracting activity of Afghanistan and Iraq belongs to them and their cronies. The construction giant Parsons can build an army barracks in Iraq that begins leaking like a sieve from the beginning. Their response to federal inspectors: If you want improvements you have to pay us more.

It is totally corrupt and dangerous to the

future of this nation. It is they who pushed us into Iraq and that, in fact, is murderous. We see it as a lot of destruction and deaths but they see it as a whole lot of sales and profits. We are in trouble!

It was this hijacked procurement system that caused the majority of the devastation in the Katrina debacle. Our government couldn't react with urgency because they had to wait on the new owners of our procurement system to cut up the contracts and territories of the affected Gulf region. Besides, the longer the wait, the greater the devastation and that, like Iraq, means greater sales and profits. Damn the people.

Where do small and minority businesses fit into all of this? They don't. For the most part, less than 2 percent of all business is done by racial minorities. The Small Business Administration is supposed to collect the data and report it. They don't have a clue. They are accepting data that they know is false and then report it to Congress and release it to the public.

Here's an example from one of our businesses: "I had acquired an \$8 million contract with the Immigration and Nationaliza-



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tion Service. After approximately 8 months, I discovered that the INS was diverting my contract to non-minority contractors claiming to be Minority Disadvantaged Businesses.

On January 7, 1997, I sent a letter to the Office of the Inspector General for the SBA, INS and Justice Department stating that several large White firms misrepresented themselves as being small and disadvantaged businesses in order to obtain contracts set-aside for my firm. On August 7, 1997, the Justice Department OIG issued a Report confirming my allegations."

Yes, another confirmation of abuse but, once again, not a darn thing was done about it. It appears here that the government agencies, SBA and INS, must be in on the corruption. They report the false numbers as minority, and when the sham is exposed, they turn and walk away. CAUTION: Do not believe a minority business participation report from any federal agency until the above is cleaned up!

There was a time when the Office of Inspector General for each agency was the "sheriff" who would come and investigate any claim of fraud and/or abuse. But now the

sheriff has left town. In fact, the new Administrator of the General Services Administration has admonished the GSA Inspector General as being too aggressive and is attempting to cut his funding by \$5 million that would lessen his effectiveness. Wrong has become right, and honest, sincere minority businesses are being shown the door in a formal, systematic way.

When the new 110th Congress starts in January, I will be asking the new chairs of the Senate and Congressional Small Business Committees, Sen. John Kerry and Congresswoman Nydia Velasquez, to confront this awful situation. The federal government's procurement system is as corrupt now as it has ever been. Minority businesses have been squeezed out and are doing probably less than the levels of 1960. We just don't know because no one has accurate numbers.

The nation is weakened by the above. We are going to stupid wars we cannot possibly resolve, and fine young soldiers are dying or being maimed for life needlessly. Victims of natural disasters are dying and/or suffering by the deliberate actions of the greedy. Greed has no end and this won't stop until some leaders step forward and fight those who make or let it happen.

Harry C. Alford is the founder and CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

## NYPD shooting: Police action tests delicate balance

By Marc H. Morial  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The recent tragic police shooting of 23-year-old Sean Bell near a Queens, New York, strip club on the morning of his wedding gave New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg a golden opportunity. He got to show off his race-relations skills for Rev. Al Sharpton and prove he could reach out across the aisle in hopes of defusing a potentially explosive situation.

Sharpton, a veteran of previous police-conduct incidents, rose to the occasion within hours of the tragedy, emerging as official point person for the Bell family. He immediately consoled the victims and their family and friends, arranged two news conferences, planned a community rally and courted the mayor, who in his last election did well with middle-class minority voters around the neighborhood where the shooting occurred.

The *Chicago Tribune's* Clarence Page described Sharpton as a natural choice to take the leadership role in this situation. "Now,

just ask yourself: If police shot your son to death before his wedding and wounded two friends after firing 50 shots into their car and there was no gun found in their car, whom would you call?" he wrote recently.

Bloomberg decided to read from a different playbook than some of his predecessors — namely Rudolph Giuliani and Ed Koch, whose administrations were punctuated by unsettling racial incidents. With the help of and on the recommendation of Sharpton, the mayor convened a summit of community leaders in an effort to quell possible tensions emerging between the New York City Police Department and the African-American community, where the use of excessive force by police seems to occur more frequently, at least, anecdotally, than in other communities.

Bloomberg won kudos for describing the



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shooting as "inexplicable" and "unacceptable" and "excessive" and for respecting the wishes of the Bell family by not attending Sean's funeral. He had instead sent Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, a former CEO of the New York Urban League, to be the administration's representative.

"What you've seen in the last week between the mayor and the Black elected officials and leaders represents five years of work and developing relationships with people," observed New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, the city's highest-ranking Black official in a December 3 story in *The New York Times*. "People believe his intentions are good, and I think that goes a long way."

At a private meeting with Bloomberg and New York Police Commissioner Ray Kelly, Sharpton didn't even ask for the commissioner's resignation — he lent his support, while at the same time joking that most police commissioners who garner his support usually get fired, according to the news story.

News of the Bell tragedy quickly opened up old wounds within the African-American community and raised ghosts of previous shootings incidents in which unarmed Black men ended up on the wrong side of the law's gun. Sharpton and Bloomberg's spirit of cooperation and goodwill may have helped keep those tensions at bay so far but the New York Police Department is doing little to help ensure this delicate balance. Recent police raids tied to the shooting are starting to test the patience of Black leaders who have been preaching calm to their constituents until a full investigation is completed.

"My role is to try to keep things at an even keel," reported Bishop Erskine Williams to

the *New York Times* recently. "But at some point they're going to say, 'Rev, what side are you on?'" he added, referring to residents who are angry about how the police investigation is unfolding. "On a scale of 1 to 10, the distrust was a 7. Now it's a 10-and-a-half."

Just days earlier, according to press reports, Williams' son, a friend of Bell's party, was picked up by police on a traffic summons. He was one of several people that were brought in for questioning. Since the shooting, the police seem to be in a frantic search for vindication in their efforts to uncover potentially non-existing evidence that may justify their hail of 50 bullets upon Bell's car, killing him and injuring two of his friends.

The department is showing little sensitivity for the victims and their families and friends by hauling them in for questions on minor offenses in their zealous quest to find the elusive fourth man who allegedly fled the scene and owned the "gun" that prompted undercover officers to open fire.

In a recent column in the *New York Daily News*, Errol Louis took issue with Black leaders' advocacy of calm in light of recent actions by police: "Patience is not on the agenda, nor should it be. Those counseling calm rarely acknowledge — and perhaps don't know — that frightened, under-trained cops have been treating unarmed Black and Latino residents with deadly aggression for decades," he wrote.

I have to say I'm starting to agree. That is why the National Urban League has called upon the U.S. Justice Department to keep an eye out on the police's tactics in investigating this tragedy. Employing practices of witness intimidation is hardly a way to get to the bottom of the matter and implement policies to avoid future tragedies.

It's just a matter of time before Black leaders advocating calm will just get up and leave  
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Democrats. In addition, other groups, such as those representing progressive women, represent more members than the conservative wing of the Democratic Party. The Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues, for example — co-chaired by Barbara Lee and Lynn Woolsey — will have at least 71 members in January.

It makes no sense to capitulate to 20 percent of the party while ignoring the needs of the other 80 percent.

Although some members of the CBC feel we should be doing cartwheels over their election to power committees and subcommittees, the new Speaker of the House has already proven that she is willing to ignore the wishes of the CBC.

Ron Walters, a highly-respected political scientist at the University of Maryland, and I were guests on Jesse Jackson's talk show last Sunday. All three of us concluded that African-Americans can't relax now that Blacks have more power in Congress. In order to bring about change and keep some of the Black lawmakers on course, African-Americans must lobby them and hold them accountable. And when Pelosi steps out of line, she, too, should feel the heat.

If we fail to do that, we might continue to have a good time every year at CBC weekend, but we will have minimal influence in Congress. And if that's going to be the case, why go through the motions.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.