

DNC chair: State lagging in minority contracting

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — As the Commonwealth of Virginia is poised to spend more than \$4 billion of the \$787 billion stimulus money being spread across the U.S., Virginia Gov. Tim Kaine, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, admits Virginia's record of spending with minority contractors has been pathetic and even worse with specifically Black-owned businesses and contracting firms.

"It is the case that the state has had an abysmal record in minority contracting. We're getting a lot better although we're not where we want to be yet," Kaine said in an interview with the NNPA News Service.

Based on a study of Virginia procurement commissioned by Kaine's predecessor Gov. John Warner, Kaine confirmed "the portion of our discretionary spending on contracts that went to minority firms was .4 of 1 percent."

He says the percentage for minority business has increased from as low as 0.44



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percent to as high as 6 percent under his administration. However, he added, when broken down by race, "the African-American portion is still in the kind of 2 percent range. We need to get better than we are, but we have been dramatically moving the numbers... We're probably behind others, but there are similar problems in other states," Kaine said.

He's correct about other states. In fact, Black contracting associations across the nation are deeply concerned that although the White House has promised that the stimulus money will be subject to federal anti-discrimination laws, monitoring on the state and local levels will

simply not be enough to know where the money is actually going.

"The biggest fear that the African-American contractors have is that it will go to the majority contractors and they're going to divvy out a little bit of nothing to the

smaller contractors," said Omar Sharef, president of the Chicago-based African-American Contractors Association. It represents more than 1,200 Black-owned firms in 11 states, including Virginia. "The majority guys are already tracking this money. We want to see it on Main Street," said Sharef. "Nepotism, cronyism and racism plays a deep part in this. Nothing is going to be done equally and fairly for the small businesses."

The commonwealth of Virginia has been consistently under strong pressure from the Black-owned *Richmond Free Press* newspaper to increase dollars with Black

businesses.

In 2004, Editor/Publisher Ray Boone states in an editorial referring to the 0.44 percent, "The facts show that the *Free Press* has hardly overstated the case. If anything, we have understated the case. The enormity of the economic injustice would not allow us to exaggerate the case... It is simply in-your-face evidence that Virginia is not considering, indeed, is turning away minority-owned businesses who want to participate in the state's procurement process."

Sources say members of the Congressional Black Caucus have also been deeply concerned about how

Black businesses and contractors will fair. However, because of recent court decisions, there are few real mandates that can be made for Black participation and no set-asides or even percentage goals are legal, said U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., a civil rights lawyer.

"There's language throughout the bill that encourages the use of minority contractors. But, unfortunately, the state of the law does not allow strong language that would require a reasonable portion of the funds to be spent with minority contractors," said Scott. "All we can do is require it."
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Bill helps foreclosure on renters

Special to Sentinel-Voice
WASHINGTON (NNPA) — U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minneapolis, has introduced renter protection legislation called the Protecting Tenants at Foreclosure Act of 2009.

A recent report by researchers at Credit Suisse, an international investment

bank, estimates that 16 percent of all mortgages will enter into foreclosure within the next four years. In Hennepin County, foreclosures increased by 32 percent just this past year.

"The wave of Minnesota homes foreclosed on these past two years has devastated our families and our communities. However, an untold consequence of this crisis is what happens to families who rent properties foreclosed on," Ellison said.

Sadly, since state and local laws often don't provide basic protections, many tenants in foreclosed properties can be evicted without notice. In fact, according to a recent report by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, only 17 states require that renters receive notice in such

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circumstances, while only 12 require that tenants be named as parties to foreclosure proceedings before their lease is terminated. In Minnesota, a two month notice period is required.

"It is simply wrong when hardworking families who have played by the rules are being kicked out of their homes without any warning. Although they were not the ones who caused the current

crisis, they are suffering the consequences by being treated as collateral damage. This is unacceptable," the 5th District Congressman stated.

Ellison's bill would address this problem by creating a uniform federal standard to protect tenants in foreclosed properties. Specifically, it would provide tenants with a 90-day notice prior to eviction. This covers
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Race

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cans" last month. Renewed sparring took place later as Clyburn criticized Sanford for mentioning Zimbabwe.

The comparison "was beyond the pale," Clyburn said. "The question that ought to be asked of him: Is he playing the race card? I don't know why he picked that country."

A day earlier, Sanford talked about Zimbabwe, Argentina and post-World War I Germany as examples of nations that dealt ineptly with hard economic times.

"What you're doing is you're buying into the notion of we just print some more money

that we don't have, send it to some states, we'll create jobs. If that's the case, then why isn't Zimbabwe a rich place?" Sanford said.

Sanford spokesman Joel Sawyer said Clyburn was off base about a racial angle to the comments.

Clyburn "is quickly becoming a professional at playing the race card because he doesn't want to face the simple reality that this Stimulus Bill is ripping off every constituent that he claims to represent," Sawyer said. The White House did not immediately return messages seeking comment on Sanford's waiver request.

Budget

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dropped out to be at home with her child because she lost her childcare funding. This is very discouraging."

The prevailing sentiment among most was that tax increases should remain on the table, despite Gibbons' pledge not to raise tariffs. Other ideas to produce revenue included legalizing marijuana — the notion being that doing so erases its black-market value and reduces crime — and curtailing the incarceration of non-violent offenders to relieve jail overcrowding. Another option is a state lottery; lawmakers have beaten back two dozen attempts to create one.

Henrietta Peterson said city officials should be focused on ways to improve

education, not trying to build a new City Hall.

Sam Mannino argued against any tax increase, saying that Nevada needs to lower taxes to attract businesses. If parents spent more time raising their children, said Jack Ramjeeawon, we could reduce the cost of expensive after-school programs. And Myron Hughes said government shouldn't be in the job-creation business; that's the role of private industry.

Still others said municipalities should reduce overtime pay for police and firefighters and redirect money from prison construction into education. Assemblyman Morse Arberry, chair of the local town hall meeting, assured families in



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy
Assemblyman Morse Arberry, chair of the Ways and Means Committee, and Assembly Speaker Barbara Buckley listen to testimony during a town hall meeting on the state budget.

Southern Nevada that state lawmakers working in Carson City understand their hardships.

Community activist Louie Overstreet said there's no political consensus as to how to raise money in these tough times. Dina Neal, an instruc-

tor at the College of Southern Nevada teaching business law, questioned how the state will raise money after getting \$1.5 billion injection from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"What economic action will be taken once the boom

in construction has taken place and their is a downturn when this construction has been completed? When you consider that sixty percent of the general fund comes from gaming revenue, it's not sound to cut things that are now deficient like education. The short-term solution is to ask gaming to take a temporary hit and allowing the state to create a more balanced and diversified state budget with growth in banking, mining, manufacturing, pharmaceutical, and research technologies."

Ruby Waller's concerns are more immediate. She lost her job in November and is on the verge of losing her home because she can't afford her mortgage. The time for partisan politics, she said,

is over. "I'm asking them to put their egos aside and work with President Obama to get this stimulus money to help those that are unemployed and need it the most."

But deciding on what action to take, said Carolyn Essex, has become the typical political parlor game — no one wants to budge. She's particularly upset with Gov. Gibbons.

"Recent indicators report a rise in the unemployment rate, increased home foreclosures, failing businesses, and a sharp increase in demands for public assistance. Everyone agrees that now is the time to act, but that response has been weakened by a governor whose leadership is unreasonable, detrimental, and contrary to the people in this state."