

## President's Message

### Diversity vs. Inclusion

July 2007

The Black Business Association (BBA) was founded to and continues to work toward the increase of Corporate America's supplier engagement of black-owned, controlled, and operated business enterprises. In light of the June 28, 2007, US Supreme Court ruling stating that race can not be used as a factor in assigning students to certain schools, we find this to be a strike against a fundamental principle of the BBA.

The essential question underlying the potential ripple effect of this Supreme Court ruling is how closely this ruling will affect the work of economic diversity efforts throughout Corporate America. As the Supreme Court's opinion relates to the overall "diversity issue" where many laws and regulations regarding minority supplier utilization are in place today, a lot can be read into the utterance of Chief Justice John G. Roberts, Jr. who stated: "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race."

Even though the Supreme Court Justices are divided 5 to 4 on this ruling, the ability of public school districts to use race to determine which students can attend which schools is a decision that potentially limits integration programs across our country. Even our distant cousin, Justice Clarence Thomas, made a notable statement on race-based decision-making: "Indeed, if our history has taught us anything, it has taught us to beware of elites bearing racial theories."

Although the Court's ruling relates solely to public schools, it is a legal

diversity decision ruling that warrants discussion with regard to the effects of socioeconomic programs operated by the public and private sector business industries. I would like to pose the "diversity" outlived its usefulness? Variety, mixture, assortment, and multiplicity are all wrapped up in the concepts offered by supplier diversity. On the other hand, the concept of inclusion seeks methods to add to the existing situation as seamlessly as possible, through the same door of total opportunity.

The BBA has consistently worked from a platform of inclusion, since inclusion connotes more of a voluntary action and supports the invitation concept versus a potentially negative tag line inferring divergence from something of greater substance. The practice of diversity is in essence an arbitrage process of exploiting the difference between national cultures and even taking a somewhat insignificant position of the supply chain activity into different places to accommodate the services of these different groups.

Some might say that supplier diversity has taken good intentions in a poor direction by diverting core business functions apart from the annual spend in various areas to give diverse companies bid opportunities. Similar to the old segregationist who did not solely tell black children where they could go to school but perpetuated a caste system steeped in the institutions of slavery and 80 years of legalized subordination. There are those who think of diversity, affirmative action, and inclusion as mere semantics. However, when you are dealing with large scale

marketing strategies the language becomes quintessential to motivating the masses to derive the desired outcome. For example, when the public and private sectors examine their respective councils, advisors and board of directors, they must come to grips with the largely non-inclusive representation of their memberships. Ultimately, there has to be a true review if we are ever going to reach a domestic global strategy of inclusion.

Overall, the June 28, 2007 Supreme Court Ruling will not abruptly change the BBA's race-conscious policies, because we have always considered all small business enterprise from a domestic global strategy of inclusion and we honor fair competition. Since 1970, the BBA has consistently advocated for the inclusion of small business enterprise as major corporate suppliers. We do this with the full intent of increasing the awareness of black entrepreneurs, while not diverting attention from Corporate America's major suppliers.

The idea to move quality products and lower costs is paramount in the practices of the BBA. The intent of the BBA remains positive to serve as a beacon of global inclusion. Race/gender-based decision-making has no reliable place for sustaining long-term economic growth for businesses owned, controlled, and operated by African Americans. We understand that effective and efficient business decisions are made with the highest responsible and most responsive economic choice possible.

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