

President's Message The Foremost Champion of Federal Contracting Parity

June 2007

In November 1975, the Black Business Association (BBA) was held in very high regard through its work with the Honorable Congressman Parren



(l-r) Hon. Parren J. Mitchell and Earl "Skip" Cooper, II, current President/CEO, BBA

J. Mitchell, who was first elected to his eight terms in Congress in 1970 from the 7th District of Baltimore, Maryland. Sadly, on Memorial Day 2007, this giant of small business development made his Transition at the age of 85 years and we mourn the passing of this great legislator who pioneered the federal government's understanding on the importance for increasing supplier engagement contracts with black and other minority business enterprises.

Looking back, I recall that the BBA conducted its first trade mission to Washington, DC over thirty years ago. This meeting was three years before Congressman Mitchell lead the enactment of the landmark Public Law 95-507, which was placed into law on October 24, 1978, amending the Small

Business Investment Act of 1958. Essentially this legislation represents the foundation for opening full participation in our free enterprise system to socially and economically disadvantaged persons to have opportunities for equipments, supplies, services, materials, and construction work from federally administered contracts.

At the request of Congressman Mitchell, BBA members on that first trade mission shared their challenges with contracting practices. The BBA members described many experiences that help to give impetus for drafting this necessary public law still active today. We were also extremely delighted to have Parren Mitchell serve as Keynote Speaker at our first Black Business Day Luncheon in 1987, held at the Bo-

naventure Hotel in Los Angeles, where he stated that economic power is vital for black enterprise to survive. He was quoted, "The task of opening doors to equal justice and civil rights in the great country of ours was long, painful and arduous, but it doesn't begin to compare with our fight for economic security."

That luncheon was held two decades ago and part of Congressman Mitchell's speech unfortunately still resonates with our current federal administration. "We're out there [Congress] by ourselves, with few, if any friends on the inside. Time was that we had friends in the Justice Department and the sympathetic ear of the Attorney General, but not with this (Reagan) Administration, so we must fend for ourselves. The executive administration turns a deaf ear to set asides and affirmative action in government contracts for blacks and other minority firms, saying it would establish a bad precedent. When in fact, the United States government has subsidized the railroads, airlines, automobile industry, farmers, farm conglomerates, major military contractors, and numerous other American businesses



(l-r) Louis King, former Chairman, Black Business Association (BBA), Honorable Parren J. Mitchell, and Earl "Skip" Cooper, II, BBA President (1982)



for over a century.”

As President of the BBA at that time, Earl Graves, Founder and CEO of Black Enterprise Magazine, graciously served as the luncheon Honorary Chairman. Mr. Graves was very appreciative of his role with this BBA event and considered it a great privilege when he introduced the Honorable Parren Mitchell during the luncheon. This was a huge occasion for everyone involved, with Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley in attendance to present proclamations to the BBA and to the Black Enterprise magazine for working to increase open access opportunities for public and private supplier contracts.

Congressman Parren Mitchell was continuously seeking support to raise the awareness on the utilization of black enterprise in the United States. He was relentless in his approach and warned those who influenced the buy-

ing decisions against “fragmentation”. He wanted everyone to shoulder the responsibility as a group to gain economic empowerment, and asserted that the old tricks of divide and conquer were unacceptable, with small business development being only as strong as its weakest link.

We learned from Congressman Mitchell that he also served as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army during World War II, having received the Purple Heart for jumping on a live grenade to save the lives of three other soldiers. The Congressman later attended Morgan State University and obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree. When he applied in 1950 to the University of Maryland’s graduate program, the University President rebuffed him by saying it was “inadvisable for Blacks to attend the College Park campus”, so Parren sued and prevailed, becoming the first Black to receive a postgraduate degree from the main campus of the University of Maryland. This was the start of a long and productive life in fighting bigotry and creating opportunity for the underserved.

The BBA dedicates this month’s Black Business News to the late Parren J. Mitchell, the Godfather of Black Business and the foremost champion of Federal contracting parity. He means a lot to our work and we are committed to continuing his fight for contracting parity. Thank you for reading this month’s news and for your involvement with the BBA activities. 🙏

Earl “Skip” Cooper, II
President/Chief Executive Officer



CORPORATE ADVISORY BOARD

- American Honda Motor Company
- AT&T
- Bank of America
- The Boeing Company
- British Petroleum
- California Lottery
- Citibank
- Coca-Cola Enterprises
- Comerica Bank
- Department of Water & Power
- Fannie Mae
- IBM
- Kaiser Permanente
- LAEDC
- Los Angeles World Airports
- Northrop Grumman Corporation
- Raytheon Company
- S.C.R.P.C.
- Sempra Energy
- Southern California Edison
- Swinerton Builders
- Toyota Motor Sales, Inc.
- Turner Construction Company
- Union Bank of California
- USBank
- Verizon
- Walt Disney Company
- Washington Mutual
- WellPoint
- Wells Fargo Bank
- Lyceum Management Services, *Ex Officio*
- Hollis Smith, *Ex Officio*
- Paulette Williams, *Ex Officio*

AFFILIATES

- Association of Black Women Entrepreneurs
- Black Women’s Network
- California Black Chamber of Commerce
- The Greenlining Institute
- Minority Business Enterprise Legal Defense & Education Fund
- National Black Business Council
- The National Association of African American Chambers of Commerce
- The National Black Chamber of Commerce
- Pan African Film & Arts Festival
- Recycling Black Dollars

Black Business Association

P.O. Box 43159
Los Angeles, CA 90043 USA
Tel: (323) 291-9334
Fax: (323) 291-9234
URL: www.bbala.org
E-mail: bbala@earthlink.net

Over 35 years of service • Founded 1970

SINCE 1970, the Black Business Association (BBA), a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization, headquartered in Los Angeles, has contributed to and supported the development, progress and expansion of more than 10,000 African-American businesses.

Nationally, we have access to and influence with more than 75,000 African-American owned and women/minority-owned businesses (WMBE’s), through the formation of strategic alliances with trade associations and organizations nationwide.

Our Mission

The Black Business Association’s mission is to advocate for and advance the development and growth of African-American owned businesses. We contribute to and participate in the self-determination, economic growth and prosperity of African-American communities, thereby creating a strong economic base that nurtures, empowers and supports the on-going success of these communities and our society at large.