

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION		NUMBER: 4300-6
SUBJECT: Civil Rights Policy for the Department of Agriculture	DATE: June 30, 2000	
	OPI: Office of the Secretary	

1 PURPOSE

This regulation prescribes civil rights policy for the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and identifies civil rights strategic goals for USDA. It also requires agencies and staff offices to incorporate the goals into their strategic plans in compliance with the Government Performance and Results Act.

2 SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

Departmental Regulation 4300-6, Civil Rights Policy for the Department of Agriculture, dated March 16, 1998, is hereby revised.

Specific objectives to achieve the goals are identified in civil rights implementation plans which are referenced in the civil rights performance elements and standards for agency heads and staff office directors.

3 POLICY

The Department of Agriculture is committed to affording every employee and customer fair and equitable treatment without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status.

- a STRATEGIC GOALS. Departmental officials and agency heads will act on this commitment by taking the necessary steps to implement a viable civil rights program. To assist in translating this commitment into meaningful action, each agency head will strive to achieve the following civil rights strategic goals:

- (1) Hold managers, supervisors, and other employees accountable for ensuring that USDA customers and employees are treated fairly and equitably, with dignity and respect.
 - (2) Ensure equal access and provide equal treatment in the delivery of USDA programs and services to all customers.
 - (3) Eliminate under-representation in the workforce by recruiting and employing a highly skilled, competent, and diverse workforce, free of discrimination, reprisal, and sexual harassment.
 - (4) Provide sufficient human, fiscal, and organizational resources, and train all employees, to institute an effective civil rights program.
 - (5) Ensure equal opportunity to minority, women-owned, and small and disadvantaged businesses in USDA procurement and contracting activities.
- b PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PLANS. Civil rights performance will be evaluated as a part of the performance appraisal process of all USDA employees. A separate critical civil rights performance element will be included in the management performance plans of all supervisors.
- c ACCOUNTABILITY. Department officials, managers, supervisors and other employees will be held accountable for discrimination, civil rights violations, and related misconduct. Agencies will take appropriate corrective or disciplinary action.
- (1) Any final decision containing a finding of discrimination, or any settlement agreement or conciliation agreement in a claim of discrimination against USDA employees will be referred to the Agency Human Resources Management Office for appropriate action.

- (2) The Department's Office of Human Resources Management will determine appropriate action in cases in which the benefit conferred by a final decision containing a finding of discrimination, settlement agreement, or conciliation agreement involves a novel issue that has precedential or Departmentwide impact or exceeds a financial threshold to be established by the Assistant Secretary for Administration.

This policy applies to all customers and employees regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status or family status. USDA employees, in Washington and all field offices, must commit to uphold this policy. Also, reprisal of any kind against employees or customers will not be tolerated.

The Subcabinet, agency heads, managers, supervisors and other employees across the Department will be held accountable for civil rights at USDA. All employees must demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunity for all.

- END -

TALKING POINTS
USDA Civil Rights Issues
6/22/00

USDA is finalizing the adoption of a comprehensive Accountability Policy and Discipline Procedures. The Accountability Policy requires a third-party review whenever a civil rights complaint is settled or resolved, or a finding of discrimination is made. The Disciplinary Procedures prescribe appropriate penalties for misconduct and wrongdoing.

USDA is already holding its employees responsible for discriminatory acts. From January 1999 through March 2000, disciplinary action was taken against 94 USDA employees for civil rights related misconduct.

At Secretary Glickman's direction last fall, all USDA agencies are completing standardized civil rights reviews to determine their compliance with policy, regulations, and statutes for all protected groups. These compliance reviews will result in corrective measures individualized to the needs of the agency (management diversity training in the case of the Food Nutrition Service, for example).

Civil rights cases are being heard, processed, and settled in large numbers. The USDA Office of Civil Rights has closed 442 employment complaint cases this fiscal year through merit decisions and settlement.

CIVIL RIGHTS 2000: A CONTINUING JOURNEY

remarks prepared for delivery
by
U.S. Agriculture Secretary
Dan Glickman

Washington, DC
June 29, 2000

Thank you Pearlie for your leadership and for your guidance on this very important subject.

Good morning. Thank you all for coming. This was a good opportunity to get together because human relations and civil rights folks from all over the country were in town this week. I've called you all together to talk about the state of civil rights at *our* USDA-- the state of our efforts to foster *good human relations* at the people's department.

Since we released our progress report on civil rights in May, I've been thinking about our effort -- what we set out to do, what we've achieved, what continues to haunt us and what more needs to be done.

Sometimes people don't see civil rights as something that affects them. But if you look at civil rights as part of a larger issue -- human relations -- then it becomes more tangible to everyone. It's about how people get along and how people treat each other. It's not just about blatant acts of discrimination. It's about human understanding; it's about communicating; it's about taking a moment to grasp someone else's perspective who just sees things a little bit differently. Civil rights -- human rights -- begin and end with our personal conviction to treat each other with respect. *How we treat each other defines who we are.*

The fact is that seven years ago civil rights wasn't a priority of this Department. And, quite frankly, when I was a member of Congress and on the House Agriculture Committee, USDA's civil rights issues weren't on the radar screen there either.

So we began this journey together, and now, today, I want to take a measure of where we are and where we've yet to go.

Our accomplishments are varied, and I believe significant. We've increased farm loans to women and minorities. We're reaching out to minority owned businesses through various partnerships. And last year we awarded \$300 million in contracts to socially disadvantaged and minority firms -- nearly 10% of the total. And right now we're in the midst of completing what may be the largest civil rights settlement in our nation's history -- hundreds of millions of dollars -- to African American farmers.

Part of solving the civil rights dilemma means having better representation of minorities and women. So, even while we've downsized USDA's workforce by 15% we've *increased* representation of women, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asian Pacific Islanders, American Indians. And we've got more minorities and women serving on county committees. But, while that's a good start, I want to see even more diversity.

Our civil rights office has been expanded to not only deal with complaints – which I will talk more about later – but to reach out to minorities, and to train managers and employees in civil rights issues. *And we are disciplining civil rights offenders – 94 cases in the last 18 months.*

We also need to consider the intangibles, the progress we've made that cannot be measured in numbers. Do people feel good about coming to work? Are they more comfortable here? I believe *on balance things are far better than they've ever been*, even four or five years ago. But frankly, *it needs to get a whole lot better.*

Even so, what I will not stand for is anyone – whatever their perspective or beliefs, whatever side they're on – who disparages, in word or deed, *the good work and good hearts of the vast majority of the people of USDA. That is just plain wrong.*

Civil rights and good human relations takes work, day in and day out. When it comes to people getting along with each other, our work is never finished. It's the kind of battle that needs to be fought over and over again. And, *there are no easy answers.* Someone once said that for every problem there is a simple and wrong solution. If there were a simple answer, I think we would have found it by now.

It is clear that you can't make progress without a strong civil rights structure in place. But at times some employees and customers feel that too often this Department is drowning in process – that while discrimination continues to rear its ugly head, we're caught up in rules, regulations and procedures -- *when what they want is action and answers.*

We all need to coexist. Putting reliable systems in place is important, but we cannot let process mute the need to understand the human element – the need for people to be heard and listened to. And we must not view our civil rights effort as a program to be completed in a finite time frame – implement it and then we're done – like making grants, disaster payments or putting out a forest fire.

We should not be caught up only in process. Our employees and customers want and deserve actions and answers. We must be positive, constructive and work toward a better future. To do so means *we need to be both tough and compassionate.*

Martin Luther King said, "We must combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart." For the tender heart, I would say we all need to pause and reexamine our own attitudes and those of our coworkers. We need to understand that civil

rights is about human relations. We need to understand that even as most of us celebrate our diversity – the melting pot that is America – there are those who fear diversity and are threatened by others who are different. It's not fair, but it's a reality. We also need to understand that there are those who want to help, who want to change things, who want to solve these problems, whose hearts are in the right place, but they don't know how. ***We must show each other the way.***

For the toughness of the serpent I would say we need to strengthen our systems, our programs and civil rights enforcement. We need to ***set a benchmark***, a baseline to which future managers, future Secretaries and future Administrations will be held accountable. ***However, establishing policy means nothing without meaningful execution.*** But because USDA is a very decentralized organization -- much more so than most federal agencies and departments -- it is the responsibility of every under secretary, every administrator, every manager in every county ***to ensure that the civil rights policies of this department are carried out.***

Let's be frank, there's going to be a new Secretary here next year, and another one sometime after that. I want you to know ***I'm going to sit down with my successor and I'm going to lay it out*** -- exactly what we've done, exactly where USDA is headed and the institutional structure that we've put in place to deal with civil rights. There is no turning back. The employees of USDA won't have it any other way. We have made it a policy that every employee and customer be treated fairly – we put civil rights at USDA on the map – we made civil rights enforcement a priority – and nobody can take that away. That is the standard we've set against which all future managers will be measured. But it is also a standard that every employee of the department and the next Administration must carry on.

Today, I'm taking several actions to further enhance our ability to enforce civil rights and improve human relations.

I'll begin with requiring greater accountability. There's a perception out there that some people can use the settlement process to avoid disciplinary action -- sort of like a no-fault divorce. No harm, no foul kind of thing. That's a problem and we have to fix it. We need to make sure that bad actors can't manipulate the system and manage to slip under the radar. But at the same time we don't want to deter people from using our settlement process to resolve claims. So today I'm announcing that all civil rights settlements will automatically be referred to agency human resources people who will decide what, if any, further action to take – with bigger cases kicked upstairs for review at the Department level.

I want to take a moment to talk about performance evaluations. In theory, issues concerning civil rights and human relations are considered a critical element of these evaluations. But in fact, these areas are sometimes given cursory consideration. In many cases people have come to expect an outstanding or exceeds rating as an entitlement when it should be earned. I expect our managers to rigorously review evaluations of civil rights and human relations performance in the same way they review any other job requirement – from getting to work on time to getting the paper work done. I also expect the most senior managers of our department to monitor this; and

their oversight will be a part of their review process as well.

Next, as the inspector general's report indicated, our Office of Civil Rights has been unable to handle the sheer volume of complaints. In fact, there are over 600 claims that haven't even gotten past the first step. So, today I am directing the Office of Civil Rights to hire outside contractors to review these claims and determine whether they should be moved to phase two -- investigation. *We need to get this process moving, and if bringing in outside help is what we've got to do, then that's what we'll do.* ✓

But taking action to more quickly resolve existing complaints is only addressing part of the problem. We need to find out why we're getting these complaints in the first place. I would expect that each agency would have investigated the reasons why this is happening, why there's a high concentration of complaints in some areas. So today I'm announcing an experiment. We are going to select three or four geographical areas from different agencies with high volumes of complaints where I will send an outside investigatory team with a mandate to get answers and report back directly to me. These will be outside, objective investigators brought in to find answers and hopefully offer up some solutions. ✓

One of the biggest concerns I'm getting from talking to managers and employees is that many minority employees feel that they are not being heard, that nobody cares, that they've got nowhere to air their grievances -- and that many employees fear that they may be subject to retaliation or reprisal. That tells me that our managers are not always doing their jobs, that our various agencies don't have the proper systems in place where people feel they can get some action. So employees grievances are sometimes left to fester. *We need early intervention.* Once again, this is not something that can be dealt with from high up. We also need everyone to understand that mediation and alternative dispute resolution can be very effective ways of resolving conflicts at early stages. Also, employee unions in many agencies have been effective in providing a structure for resolving problems before they fester. We need to pay attention to our employee representatives and we should renew our commitment to working with our Partnership Councils. But, most of all, this is an on-the-ground issue. Every agency, every county, every office needs to find a way to deal with issues of human relations before they get out of hand. This morning your under secretaries will be leading breakout sessions, where I'd like you to begin to explore ways that we can solve problems early.

I also want to make sure that we continue to address employees concerns at the Department level. So we're going to expand a process that is already working in some areas. We already have two minority advisory committees, one representing Hispanics and one representing people with disabilities. They have worked out quite well -- giving these communities a voice and another place to go with their concerns. Today I'm announcing the formation of five more employee advisory committees -- one each for African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, women, and gays and lesbians. In addition, these seven advisory committees will each send two representatives to a Diversity Council which I will charter for the purposes of advising me on issues important to these groups.

Deputy Secretary Rominger and I and some of my senior staff will attend the breakout sessions.

Do they
not know
what are
advisory committees?

Part of the agenda of these sessions is for you to give us feedback, to talk to us about the problems and the successes. I especially want you to share with us and among yourselves *what is working and what you've tried*. That's how we're going to advance our cause, step by step. But I don't look at these breakout sessions as some be-all end-all. They are part of a process, a process that I want to see all of us develop together.

In closing, I want to remind you that we here at USDA are part of a greater whole – that whole being our great nation. Next week, on Independence Day, we will celebrate some of our most cherished democratic values – liberty, freedom, justice -- a good time perhaps to reflect on what I've talked about today. And it's worth noting that the problems we have at USDA are reflective of our society as a whole – things are improving, but not fast enough. The Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964. Things are a whole lot better today than they were then, but there are still deeply entrenched, complex, emotional problems.

Civil rights is not just a USDA issue. Corporations, schools, communities are all dealing with it. I'm reminded of a passage from the Book of Proverbs, "For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." In that sense, I believe that as a society we've come a long way, that we do treat each other better than we once did, that we are making progress at improving human relations. But the proverb reminds us that who we are and how we act is rooted deep down inside each and everyone of us. So in another sense, as human beings and how we treat each other we've got a long way to go.

The work we do here is critical. We help our farmers and ranchers provide food security for our citizens unparalleled anywhere else in the world. Through programs like WIC and Food Stamps, we provide the life's basic essentials to people who have no other place to turn. Our firefighters throw themselves in harm's way to protect life and property. Our food safety inspectors, two of whom were murdered in the line of duty last week, ensure that the meat and poultry on American dinner tables is safe to eat.

With all of these critical functions and more, some of them involving life and death, we simply cannot afford to allow civil rights problems to compromise the work we do here. So while this is about justice, it's also about our ability to meet our obligations to the American people.

Each of us must make the commitment to go out and make this a better place to work and make this society a better place to live. There's nothing new in what I'm saying here. But civil rights -- and human relations in general -- is such a monumental struggle, that the message needs to be repeated -- we need to constantly renew our commitment. Attention to civil rights and human relations at USDA must be a part of our job every day, every hour, every minute. A USDA that shows the way on civil rights will not only be a better place to work...it will be a better-working place...one that is true to its name: the People's Department. Thank you.

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Record Type: Record

To: Irene Bueno/WHO/EOP@EOP, Julie M. Anderson/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc: broderick johnson/who/eop@eop, karen robb/who/eop@eop, mark d. magana/who/eop@eop
bcc:
Subject: Re: Discrimination at USDA & Congressional request for a mtg with the President

I spoke with Robb's LD. As noted, they want to meet about the USDA civil rts issue. In particular, they want to discuss the length of time it takes to do an EO suit a USDA and the "complete lack of accountability." I asked if we could do a staff level meeting prior to deciding whether a Pres meeting was necessary. He said that was okay, and I promised to call him after our 5:00 conference call tomorrow.

Irene Bueno

Irene Bueno
06/22/2000 06:42:06 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Broderick Johnson/WHO/EOP@EOP, Karen Robb/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc: Joel K. Wiginton/WHO/EOP@EOP, Mark D. Magana/WHO/EOP@EOP
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I would appreciate you calling about this issue (see article below). We are trying to clarify if Senator Robb needs to meet with the President on his concerns and also CBC Rep. Clyburn and other members of the CBC introduced legislation on this bill today and want to see if we should meet with them. We had an internal conference call today and at least tentatively think that the President does not need to meet on this issue and that we should arrange a staff level mtg but we would like your input. Please call me at 6-6594. Thanks.

----- Forwarded by Irene Bueno/WHO/EOP on 06/22/2000 06:38 PM -----

Irene Bueno
06/22/2000 03:18:26 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Irene Bueno/WHO/EOP@EOP
cc: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message
bcc:
Subject: Re: Conference Call today, Thursday at 6pm

Here's the info for the call 456-6755 code: 9422

Irene Bueno

Irene Bueno

06/22/2000 12:49:35 PM

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To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message

cc: Anna Richter/OPD/EOP@EOP

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USDA Workers: Bias Persists

By Michael A. Fletcher
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, June 22, 2000 ; A23

A group of minority and female workers at the Department of Agriculture yesterday called on President Clinton to resolve long-standing complaints of discrimination at the agency, saying that bias continues to fester there despite repeated pledges by Secretary Dan Glickman to stamp it out.

About 30 members of the Coalition of Minority Employees aired their concerns at a Capitol Hill news conference before meeting with senior USDA officials yesterday. Citing their own experiences as well as an upsurge in the number of discrimination complaints brought by USDA employees, coalition members said the agency is making little progress in its much-touted civil rights fight.

"Nothing has changed," said John Sedillo, a Forest Service employee from New Mexico. "If anything, things have gotten worse."

Members of the coalition said that minority and female employees frequently receive disparate treatment from USDA supervisors, are often steered away from assignments that will enhance their careers, are denied promotions and are targets of blatantly racist jokes or sexual harassment, particularly in the agency's rural outposts.

"There is continued widespread discrimination at USDA," said Lawrence Lucas, president of the coalition. "We demand that President Clinton meet with the coalition to resolve this."

Since being named agriculture secretary in 1995, Glickman has said that his highest priority is to make USDA into a "civil rights leader in the federal government." In May, the agency released a report that officials trumpeted as evidence of the civil rights progress that had taken place. A USDA spokesman referred to the report when asked for comment about the coalition's charges yesterday.

The report said that the agency had increased its farm lending to minorities and women, increased minority and female representation on the local committees that make loan decisions for farmers and increased the percentage of agency employees who are minorities from 17 percent to 20 percent.

"Our efforts are having a real impact on USDA's programs and people," Glickman said then.

But minority employees said that has not been enough. Despite Glickman's efforts, they said, the number of employment discrimination complaints increased by nearly 50 percent between 1996 and 1999. At the end of last year, more than 1,700 were on file.

"There are so many cases that they are largely put aside," said Rep. Patsy T. Mink (D-Hawaii), who attended the news conference.

Also, the coalition said, the agency is the target of 20 class action complaints, either in the courts or before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The coalition said several of the complaints have been filed in the past year.

"The Department of Agriculture is an overflowing cesspool of filth that needs cleaning," said John Boyd, president of the National Black Farmers Association, who is running for Congress from Virginia's 5th District. "Nothing will change unless people are held accountable for their actions."

In his May report, Glickman said that 13 employees were fired and another 81 were at least reprimanded as a result of the agency's civil rights initiative--numbers that coalition members say are inadequate.

For decades, minorities at USDA have complained about a hostile work environment that fosters discrimination against employees as well as some USDA clients.

In 1999, USDA settled a class action lawsuit brought by black farmers who charged that they were denied loans and other services because of their race. Payouts in the suit are on track to top \$1 billion.

The coalition's complaints come on the heels of a report by the agency's inspector general, who in March criticized the agency's handling of civil rights complaints. The report said USDA's civil rights division had lost more than a dozen files and mishandled hundreds of others.

During the news conference, a spokesman for Sen. Charles S. Robb (D-Va.) said that Robb plans to request a meeting between Clinton and the minority employees.

"The secretary has failed us," said Allen Spencer, an USDA employee involved in a suit against the agency. "It seems that all of our resources other than presidential action have been expended."

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Karen Robb/WHO/EOP@EOP
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adrian e. miller/who/eop@eop
jena v. roscoe/who/eop@eop
anna richter/opd/eop@eop

Rochelle Thompson

Irene Bueno

06/22/2000 07:41:24 PM

Record Type: Record

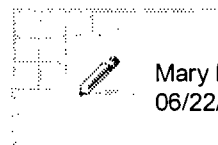
To: Rochelle G. Thompson/WHO/EOP@EOP

cc:

Subject: Talking points on USDA employee civil rights issues

Please print this for me. Thanks.

----- Forwarded by Irene Bueno/WHO/EOP on 06/22/2000 07:41 PM -----



Mary L. Smith

06/22/2000 05:20:53 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Anna Richter/OPD/EOP@EOP, Irene Bueno/WHO/EOP@EOP

cc:

Subject: Talking points on USDA employee civil rights issues

----- Forwarded by Mary L. Smith/WHO/EOP on 06/22/2000 05:20 PM -----



ANDY SOLOMON <ANDY.SOLOMON@usda.gov>

06/22/2000 04:50:00 PM

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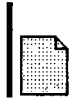
cc:

Subject: Talking points on USDA employee civil rights issues

Hope this is helpful...

Andy Solomon
USDA, Office of Communications
(202) 720-4623

· Rochelle Thompson



- coalition.wpd

TALKING POINTS ON USDA EMPLOYEES CIVIL RIGHTS ISSUES

June 22, 2000

Yesterday, the Coalition of Minority Employees, an USDA employee organization, held a press conference on Capitol Hill regarding civil rights concerns.

Department of Agriculture representatives, including the Director of Civil Rights and the General Counsel, met with the Coalition of Minority Employees group. There was a constructive discussion on issues of concern. USDA representatives expressed the Department's and the Secretary's clear commitment in continuing to improve our civil rights record.

The employees group expressed concern that USDA employees are not held accountable for discriminatory conduct.

√ A recent USDA report on civil rights documents 94 disciplinary actions have been taken against employees for discrimination or misconduct related to civil rights, including 14 dismissals.

The employees group also expressed concern that operations of USDA's Office of Civil Rights is at fault for a backlog of unresolved complaints.

√ In 1997, Secretary Glickman put into place a departmental wide Office of Civil Rights - a recommendation of his Civil Rights Task Force.

√ Recently, additional experienced management was put into the leadership team of the Civil Rights Office to continue the office's efforts to quickly resolve all backlogged complaints.

Significant progress on civil rights has taken place at the Department, a point discussed at the meeting with the employees group. USDA's recent progress report on Civil Rights documents real improvements which have been made and continue to be implemented, for example:

√ In April 1999, USDA entered into a landmark class action settlement with African American farmers.

√ Despite downsizing, minorities accounted for one out of every four hires by USDA in 1999.

√ There has been an increased emphasis on education, training and accountability on civil rights issues -

√ over 99% of the Department's workforce has completed mandatory civil rights training.



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Congressional Black Caucus

of the United States Congress

319 Cannon HOB • Washington, DC 20515 • (202) 225-3315

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From:

Michael Elazier, Communications Director

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
June 14, 2000

Contact: Michael Elazier
202-225-3315

CBC Introduces Legislation to Assist Small Farmers

(Washington, DC) — For many years, economically disadvantage small farmers have endured tremendous setbacks in their quest for economic equality. Whether they have suffered discrimination on the basis of color or financial status, the playing field has not been level to assure that farmers can make a substantial living. Most of the problems have occurred on the local level where county employees of the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency field offices have played the roles of judge, jury, and final arbitrator. This type of attitude has hampered what could have been the growth of prosperity of many farmers across the country.

Today, under the very fine leadership of Rep. Eva Clayton and Rep. Bennie Thompson, the CBC is introducing a legislative package that enables the small farmer to receive better treatment and access to programs from the county employees of the Farm Service Agency as well as better access to the necessary equipment and financial assistance needed to ensure a stable and respectable income. The package also includes a separate enforcement measure that will issue against any farmer.

The legislative package is comprised of the following three bills:

1). Rep. Clayton - "The USDA Accountability and Equity Act of 2000".

The USDA Accountability And Equity Act of 2000 has several provisions. First, it improves accountability among County and Area Committees and their employees. We do this by establishing uniform standards for conducting elections to these Committees and by converting County Committee employees into federal employees. Second, it provides improved access for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers to vital environmental programs (EQUIP) that are cost shared between the Agency and the applicant. Third, this legislation provides much needed assistance

to the 1890 Land-Grant colleges and universities for improvement of Agricultural and Food Sciences Facilities. Fourth, it provides increased funding for USDA's Outreach Program to Social Disadvantaged Farmers. Finally, it funds the Extension Indian Reservation Program and increases funding for the Ownership and Operating Loan Program. To obtain additional information or to cosponsor call Susan Kelly at 5-3101.

2). Rep. Bennie Thompson - "The Small Farmers Civil Rights Protection Act of 2000".

"The Small Farmers Civil Rights Protection Act of 2000" would identify and sanction County and Area Committees and their Employees who discriminate against farmers. This legislation gives the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to impose sanctions against County and Area Committees and their employees who are found to have discriminated on the basis of race, sex, national origin, marital status, religion, age or handicap. To obtain additional information or to cosponsor call Walter Vinson at 5-5876.

3). Rep. Clayton - H.R. 4593, "The National Employment Dispute Resolution Act of 2000".

The National Employment Dispute Resolution Act of 2000, provides for a system of voluntary mediation in all federal agencies, including USDA, as well as for most private contractors who do business with the federal government. Small contractors are excluded.

This legislation would establish alternative avenues for the resolution of disputes, by mandating a mediation system as an alternative to litigation of employee claims under those statutes. Mediation is voluntary, at the option of the Employee. Federal agency and private employers would be required to establish internal dispute resolution programs, providing, as a voluntary option, access to external third party, trained and qualified mediators. These public and private employers would be required to inform claimants of the mediation alternative and their respective rights thereof. The disputants would have 30 days to decide on the mediation option and another 90 days within which to resolve the dispute.

To obtain a copy of these bills, please contact Susan Kelly, Rep. Eva Clayton's office, x5-3101 or Walter Vinson, Rep. Bennie Thompson's office, 5-5876.

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On The Occasion Of The
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Held by The Congressional Black Caucus
Washington, D.C.
Thursday, June 22, 2000*

I am pleased to join today with my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus to set the record straight on the consistent role our Caucus has played in seeking to provide relief for this Nation's Black Farmers.

We recognize that the effort to reverse and redress the muddled history of the Black Farmer in America will take the collective energy and resources of all who have a genuine interest — without regard to Party or politics. And, we invite, as we have in the past, others — Democrats and Republicans — to join with us in this ongoing struggle.

Among federal agencies, the United States Department of Agriculture has been called "The Last Plantation." For close to four decades, Black Farmers have faced intolerable and unacceptable discrimination at the very hand of those charged with helping them. Yet, over the years, efforts to gain redress from this discrimination was met with deception, discouragement and protracted delay.

Discrimination complaints were filed at USDA, but the record shows that those complaints were tossed aside, ignored and even thrown away, with most remaining unresolved over extended periods.

Indeed, it was as a result of that meeting with the President, and his direction to his Chief of Staff at the time, Erskine Bowles, that key Republican colleagues, such as then Speaker Gingrich and Judiciary Committee Chairman Hyde were engaged in this issue. Their engagement was critical to the final passage of the language lifting the Statute of Limitations.

Also, in 1997, Members of the CBC and others introduced the "USDA Accountability and Equity Act," the first legislative initiative designed to root out discrimination within USDA. Then in 1998, because of the efforts of Black Members of Congress and others, contained in the Agricultural Appropriations Bill was language that gave relief to Black farmers, including the lifting of the statute of limitations that had prevented them from having their day in court. This too was a first. Cases dating as far back as 1983 could now be heard.

Finally, in 1999, with the lifting of the statute of limitations, the case of Pigford vs. Glickman was settled. We did not stop there, however. Also, in 1999, additional outreach funding was secured by the CBC, providing needed resources to inform Black Farmers of the lawsuit settlement.

And, we still have not stopped. During this year, the CBC continues its monitoring role of the progress of the settlements, and recently, we introduced legislation aimed at changing the course and culture of discrimination within USDA, once and for all.

With the introduction of those three bills, we hope to begin to reverse the continued discrimination at the United States Department of Agriculture. When the history of this Century is written, we want to make certain that the year 2000 will be recorded as significant in the effort to change the course and culture at the United States Department of Agriculture.

For too long, those who seek simply to be served by USDA have not been served because of a system that has treated many of them differently solely because of who they are. We want to bring that sad chapter in USDA's history to a close.

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NEWS from



Congressman

Sanford Bishop

2nd Congressional District, Georgia

1433 Longworth HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 22, 2000

CONTACT: SELBY MCCASH
(202) 225-3631

**CONGRESSMAN BISHOP ISSUES STATEMENT
ON INITIATIVES TO ASSIST BLACK FARMERS**

The legislative package my CBC colleagues and I introduced last week is the latest in a series of initiatives we have undertaken over a number of years to ensure fair treatment to America's minority farmers, and in fact, to all small farmers. While we have made some progress in the fight against discrimination, more needs to be done if we are to fully achieve the goal of fairness as the new millennium begins.

Therefore, we believe it is time to enact initiatives that will produce tangible, meaningful results-- rather than rush to embrace measures that do nothing but make empty promises.

Today, I join with my colleagues in challenging majority leaders in Congress to support legislation that will provide real protection against discriminatory treatment. By focusing on legislation that is all rhetoric and no substance, they only divert attention from the real needs. I challenge them to support bills like those we recently unveiled to establish a new level of protection against unfair treatment. These bills are:

-- "The USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) Accountability and Equity Act," to set uniform standards for selecting of USDA county and regional committees and their staffs to promote fair representation.

-- "The Small Farmers Civil Rights Protection Act," to impose new penalties against discriminatory practices by anything in a position of government authority.

-- "The "National Employment Dispute Resolution Act," to establish an accessible system of mediation to fairly resolve discrimination complaints.

PAGE 2-- CONGRESSMAN SANFORD BISHOP

Among the initiatives I have taken are those in support of the creation of the U.S. Agriculture Department's (USDA) Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT), and the new anti-discrimination oversight and enforcement measures that have come from these offices; our efforts to expedite the decision in the anti-discrimination suit against the USDA and to speed-up the USDA processing of the claims; the \$7 million increase we are seeking in the FY 2001 budget for the USDA's Outreach and Technical Assistance Program to assist disadvantaged farmers; the \$1.1 billion in new farmer loan authority added to the pending FY 2000 Supplemental Agricultural Appropriations Bill; my cosponsorship of bills to exempt discrimination settlement payments from federal taxes and not to include these payments in means testing for USDA programs; and the three bills we recently unveiled.

While progress has been made, it is time to finish the job of ensuring fairness for all of our farmers.

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106th Congress

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First Vice Chair

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Congressional Black Caucus of the United States Congress

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
June 22, 2000

Contact: Michael Elazier
202-225-3315

Response of Representative James E. Clyburn (D-SC) to Republican Summit With Historically Black College And University (HBCU) Presidents

Since the Creation of the Higher Education Act in 1965, Federal Policy Concerning Higher Education Has Enjoyed Broad Bipartisan Support. The Primary Driving Force Behind The Formation of That Policy Was The Issue of Making Access to Higher Education More Accessible And Affordable to Any Student Who Wishes to Pursue a College Level Education.

Republicans And Democrats Alike Understood The Importance of Jointly Working Together to Strengthen Our Network of Institutions of Higher Education And Making That Network Available to All Regardless of Economic Condition.

Sadly, Six Years Ago That Bipartisan Cooperation Evaporated When Republicans Took Control of The House of Representatives. The Last Six Years Has Seen a Stark Politicization of The Legislative Process - Particularly as it Relates to Education Policy.

Every Aspect of Federal Education Policy Has Been Subjected to a Highly Partisan Political Process. From The Very Beginning of Their Coming to Power, The Republican Majority Sought to Exert Control Over And Show Contempt For The Continuation of a Federal Education Policy. In The Process, They Have Been Disdainful of Working With Democrats in The Congress, Often Keeping Us Uninformed With Respect to Details of Legislation Being Developed.

Their Initial Effort in This Regard Was an Attempt to Abolish The Department of Education. It Was a Symbolic Gesture Designed to Show That The Federal Role in Education Policy Should Be Ended.

When That Effort Failed, They Shifted Gears And Looked For Other Ways to Reduce or Eliminate Any Federal Involvement in Education Policy. The Latest Strategy Is to Simply Block Grant All Federal Education Funding to The States With Little or No Accountability For The Use of Those Funds. The Federal Government, in That Scenario, Would Simply Be a Passive Pass Through Entity Funneling Money to The States, Most of Which Are Controlled by Republican Governors.

Last Week The Republican House Leadership Began a New Partisan Effort Aimed at Dismantling Federal Involvement in Higher Education Policy. They Hosted a Meeting of Black College Presidents Ostensibly to Find Ways They Can Be of Assistance to Them And Their Institutions. However, If Their Past Is Any Guide With Respect to How They Have Handled Education Issues, Those Black College Presidents Had Better Watch Out For The Possibility of Having Their Collective Pockets Picked And Their Prized Federal Education Dollars Reduced, Redirected or Eliminated.

There Are 39 Black Members of The House of Representatives, 38 of Whom Are Democrats. These 38 Democratic Members Have Played a Critical Role With Respect to Support For HBCU's, Their Programs And Their Students. Many of Us Are Products of HBCU's, And Most of Us Have HBCU's in Our Districts. In Fact, All 7 of South Carolina's HBCU's Are in My District. We Know These Institutions Well And We Have Traditionally Fought to Increase Support For Them.

We Have Never Been Partisan in These Efforts. Scores of These Institutions Are in Districts Represented by non - Cbc Members. We Have Traditionally Reached Out to Other Members in Both Parties Whose Familiarity With The Role And History of HBCU's Is Not as up - Close and Personal as Ours.

The 38 Black Democratic Members of the Congress Were Instrumental in Creating a Significant Number of Initiatives Which Are Important to Black Colleges. Among Them Are

- "The Undergraduate and Graduate Black College Act" Within Title Iii of the Higher Education Act of 1965. That Provision Alone Provides the Largest Single Annual Appropriation Directly to HBCU's (More than \$1.6 Billion since 1987).
- the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program;
- the HBCU Capital Financing Program;
- the Institute for International Public Policy;
- the Thurgood Marshall Legal Educational Opportunity Program And
- Federal Support of Historic Preservation Efforts on HBCU Campuses -

One of the Beneficiaries of Our Initiative to Restore Historic Buildings on the Campuses of Hcbu's Is Langston University in the State of Oklahoma. I Find it Rather Interesting That None of the Six Buildings Our Efforts Identified on Langston's Campus as Being in Need of Federal Assistance for Restoration Have Received Any Attention from Our Republican Friends. I Have Always Been Taught That Charity Begins at Home.

In Addition, We Have Been in the Forefront of Efforts to Increase Funding for Pell Grants and Other Campus Based Aid Programs for Low Income Students — the Overwhelming Majority of the HBCU Student Population; Federal Trio Programs and Support for Howard University. We Have Enacted Legislation Strongly Encouraging All Federal Agencies—including the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation—to Set Aside Research and Development Funds to Assist Black Colleges as Well as Encouraging Those Agencies to Provide Internships and Employment Opportunities for Students and Graduates of HBCU's.

CBC Members Were Responsible for Exempting HBCU's from Elimination from Federal Student Loan Programs Because of High Student Loan Default Rates. Initially That Exemption Was Enacted and Extended over the Strenuous Objections of Republican Members of Congress. Of the 39 Black Members of Congress the Only One Invited to Attend the Summit with HBCU College Presidents Was the One Who Called the Meeting! Not One of the 38 African American Democratic Members Who Have Consistently Struggled to Aid Black Colleges Was Invited.

In Addition, Not One Democratic Member (Black or White) of the Education Committee Was Invited to Participate in That Meeting. Not Only Were Those Members Most Knowledgeable of HBCU's Not Invited, but I Have Been Informed That the Expenses of the College Presidents to Attend Were Paid by the Republican National Committee — Which Also Hosted an Elaborate Reception for Their Invitees. Of Course I Attended the Reception, but My Presence Was Not Acknowledged.

Against Such a Backdrop, it Is Hard to Imagine That the "Summit" Was Little More than a Photo Opportunity for Members Who Have Absolutely No History of Involvement and Support for HBCU's and Who, in Fact, Have a Track Record of Hostility Toward Those Very Institutions.

One Example of the Irony of the Summit Involved the Timing of the Meeting Itself. It Occurred One Day after the Republican Leadership Railroaded the Labor-health and Human Services-education Appropriations Bill Through the House on a Strict Party Line Vote — a

Bill Which Reduces Support for Education in General. The Summit in That Instance Was a Clear Example of Being a Day Late and a Dollar Short!

Another Example of the Irony Has to Do with Support for Current Pending Legislation.

One Issue High on the HBCU's Legislative Wish List Is Support for Funding Which Increases the Number of Minorities with Graduate Degrees in Areas of Critical Need. Recently Legislation Was Introduced to Create and Fund Dual Degree Program Partnerships Between HBCU's and Larger Research Universities—thereby Allowing Students at HBCU's to Receive Undergraduate and Graduate Degrees in Areas of Critical Need. Several of the 38 Black Democratic Members Cosponsored the Bill. Mr. Watts (Convener of the Republican Summit) and Other Members of the Republican Leadership Were Invited to Join as Original Cosponsors of That Legislation. Unfortunately, None of Them Saw Fit to Join in That Effort.

Also, During the Labor -HHS-Education Appropriations mark-up Process, Republican Leadership Made No Attempts to Increase the Amount of Funding Requested by the President for Higher Education Initiatives. They Simply Moved Funds Around from One Category to Another, Without Bringing One New Dollar to the Table.

Much of What We in the Congress Have Been Able to Accomplish in Support of Black Colleges over the Years Has Been a Result of Democratic Support in the U. S. House of Representatives and by Democratic Administrations in the Executive Branch. During Much of That Time, We Have Had to Overcome Objections from Republican Members of the House of Representatives — Many of Whom Continue to Question Why HBCU's Are Still in Existence, Let Alone Why The Federal Government Should Be Providing Support to Them. Now, Some of Those Opponents Have Apparently Seen the Light and Are Looking for Ways to Be Supportive.

We in the Congressional Black Caucus Welcome Them to the Cause of Helping to Strengthen the Nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Call upon Them to Support Concrete and Tangible Efforts Which Will Provide Real Dollars and Real Opportunities to These Colleges and the Thousands of Students They Serve. That Can Best Be Achieved However, by Returning to Bipartisan Cooperative Efforts—not Through Clandestine Political Rendezvous.

USDA COALITION OF MINORITY EMPLOYEES

Press Release
June 9, 2000

Contact: Lawrence C. Lucas, President
Phone: (856) 910-2399 Fax: (9856) 910-1523

DISCRIMINATION CONTINUES AT USDA

The USDA Coalition of Minority Employees in cooperation with the Class Agents: Hispanic, African American, Asian, Women, and Persons with Disabilities from around the country will be in Washington, D.C., to bring national attention to the continuing widespread discrimination at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Those attending will include: Members of Congress, the NAACP Federal Sector Task Force, USDA Employee Organizations, Unions, Civil Rights and Legal Community, the Media and others.

Wednesday, June 21, 2000, 11:00 AM
United States Capitol Grounds (The Swamp)
East/Senate Side, Near Constitution Avenue

The Conference will focus on the following:

1. Lack of civil rights **ACCOUNTABILITY**: waste of millions in tax payer dollars and few punished for discriminating.
2. Expeditionous resolution of individual and class actions complaints.
3. Need for Congressional oversight and hearings on USDA civil rights processing and administration.
4. Control of civil rights policy by the USDA Office of General Counsel (arbitrary and capricious application of civil rights laws and policies).
5. Deception and inaccurate civil rights report processing (data and tracking system).
6. Remove civil rights authority from the Assistant Secretary for Administration (conflict of interest).

THE PUBLIC IS INVITED TO ATTEND!

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DISCRIMINATION CONTINUES AT USDA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues living up to its reputation as a bastion of racism and sexism, guilty of wholesale reprisal and discrimination. It embodies the "slave-owner" mentality and is aptly called "The Last Plantation." USDA officials try to subjugate employees by manipulating the work environment, denying promotions and inflicting physical and emotional pain. These supervisors deal with USDA employees and customers disparately and capriciously and are rarely held accountable for the misery they inflict on others. Solutions have been proposed, however, the culture and behavior and attitudes have not changed. To date, USDA continues its pervasive acts of reprisal, intimidation and hostile work environment for those who seek justice.

USDA's employees and customers must unite and exert pressure on elected officials, to call for a congressional oversight committee and to request that Senator Richard Lugar hold hearings regarding civil rights at USDA and civil rights administrative procedures. It is imperative that USDA employees and customers voice their outrage.

Report after report has been authored by USDA officials and others documenting USDA's discriminatory culture: Blue Ribbon Task Force, 1996; D.J. Miller Report, March 1996; USDA Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT), 1997; CRAT Listening Sessions, 1997; USDA Civil Rights Implementation Team (CRIT); USDA/Coalition sponsored seminar, "Race, Diversity in the Workplace and in America, 1998;" the NAACP Federal Sector Task Force Interim Report, "Discrimination in the Federal Government; 1998; the NAACP Federal Sector Task Force Interim Report; "Employment Discrimination and Abuses in the Federal Workplace" "Practices, Patterns, Issues and Findings" January 2000; U.S. Civil Rights Commission Reports and many others. In March 2000, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) published a report describing USDA's civil rights programs, policies and practices as ineffective, chaotic and poorly administered. USDA "leaders" write "Reports" to deceive others into believing that change is imminent, but, are maintaining the "status quo."

USDA has failed miserably in its responsibility to its customers and employees. At the 1997 Listening Sessions, Black farmers and USDA employees expressed their concerns regarding the lack of diversity. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Persons with Disabilities, Women and others reported that those trying to use USDA's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) process were retaliated against. *The charges communicated in 1997 are identical to those conveyed in 2000 - harassment, fear, reprisal and intimidation. NOTHING HAS CHANGED! The missing ingredient for bringing about lasting institutional change at USDA is ACCOUNTABILITY!*

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In FY 2000, three years after Secretary Glickman's "Listening Sessions" employees and customers still suffer because of:

- **Disparate Treatment** - USDA's personnel rules, regulations, and policies are applied differently for women and minority employees: and programs are delivered inequitably to minority customers;
- **Lack of Career Growth** - Employees are refused permanent positions, developmental assignments, training and awards;
- **Retaliation** for filing complaints;
- **"Glass Ceilings"** - promotions denied to minorities with specialized degrees or educational achievements;
- **Hostile Work Environment;**
- **Widespread Nepotism and Favoritism;**
- **Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault;** and
- **Few, if any, Accommodations for Employees with Disabilities** - Prevents competent employees from carrying out and completing assignments.

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINTS

Refusal of USDA to resolve individual and Class Action Complaints. In FY 1999 there were 15 Class Action Complaints; Class Actions to Date: USDA has 22 Class Action Complaints.

USDA did not want African American employees to know that the African American Class Action had been filed (informal complaint was filed on February 5, 1999 and the formal complaint was filed on May 13, 1999). USDA deliberately delayed notifying African Americans, in an effort to derail the Class. USDA's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and Office of General Counsel (OGC) introduced incorrect information and tried to manipulate existing and potential class members. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) failed to certify the class on May 30, 2000, and this case will be decided in COURT.

A new Class Action has been filed against USDA on behalf of African Americans whose formal EEO complaints are being *deliberately* delayed by the Department. USDA's "Disparate Treatment" and "Deliberate Indifference " is an attempt to manipulate outcomes.

USDA has abused class action laws and policies, in its attempt to manipulate and limit its liability. Both OCR and OGC told Black employees that they could not opt-out of the Class, in an attempt to deny class members the legal rights given to them in the Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 23. The Coalition recently informed OCR and OGC of a June 23, 1999, United States Supreme Court decision, *Ortiz vs. Fibreboard Corporation*, determining that class members can opt-out.

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DYSFUNCTIONAL COMPLAINT PROCESS

Because of USDA's lack of effective leadership in civil rights, employees and customers who file EEO complaints have had to endure an extremely chaotic system.

- Lack of responsiveness by USDA's OCR - No response to calls or letters regarding status of cases;
- OCR and agency's EEO offices do not honor confidentiality;
- Sloppy Record Keeping - data and information are misreported to give the appearance of improvement;
- Non - Compliance with the terms of settlement agreements;
- Few corrective actions implemented;
- Failure to Address Systemic Issues - USDA is more concerned with settling complaints than dealing with the cause of the problems; and
- "Paying to Withdraw Complaints" - If OCR's only motivation is getting cases off the books, then legitimate issues of discrimination remain unaddressed.
- "Time Limits" - Complainants must meet time limits. Failure by one (1) day results in these cases being dismissed. Employees wait years to hear anything about their cases. USDA rarely meets deadlines and is not penalized for tardiness.

EGREGIOUS ACTS

An abundance of cases brought by women against USDA officials continue to be ignored. The charges filed by woman include: a woman requested by a supervisor to perform an indecent sex act; a woman who lost an unborn child due to a hostile work environment; a woman who had salad dressing spread on her breasts; a woman whose underwear was displayed by male coworkers on a moving motor vehicle; and a woman who was thrown down a flight of stairs by her supervisor. Affidavits describing these abuses have been submitted to the NAACP for action. USDA questions the existence of these events.

Supreme Court Opinion, Sandra Day O'Connor, Majority Decision, Title IX, 1999. The Supreme Court found that educational institutions can be held liable for sexual harassment by teachers or employees, if it had actual knowledge of harassment and remained "Deliberately Indifferent." Gebser v. Lago Vista Independent School District, 524 US. 274.

Many incidents remain uninvestigated or subject to minimal inquiry including:

- "Hangman's Nooses" displayed in conference room and employees and customers victims of racial slurs and foul language.
- Allegations filed stating that one of the highest political appointees in the Clinton Administration at USDA (Black Female) was called "Wonder Bunny" and "Jungle Bunny" by top management employees. — No Disciplinary action taken to date!
- A USDA employee (found guilty of discrimination against Black farmers) was given only a one day suspension for bringing a gun to work on government property.

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- Not one employee found to have engaged in discriminatory practices or named as a discriminating official has been punished (as a result of the recent Black Farmer Class Action Settlement).
- Allegations that evidence was purged from files to cover-up a host of sexual harassment charges brought against a former USDA Civil Rights Director.

DATA

Important EEO data being reported to EEOC and Congress is skewed to misrepresent the true state of USDA civil rights. The Department has two (2) sets of figures - an accurate set for themselves and an inaccurate set for public dissemination.

Since USDA began its civil rights improvement plan, the number of cases filed has increased. From October 1999 - May 2000, cases increased by 10%. The USDA never intended to improve civil rights, it only wanted to give the perception that it was committed to equality. Complaints are being filed faster than the Civil Rights office can handle them. FY 96-99; 48% increase in formal complaints filed.

In FY 1995 - 1997, before civil rights was made a USDA priority, EEOC found discrimination in 26 % of the cases. For FY 1998 - 2000, after civil rights became a visible priority and the "Zero Tolerance" policy was enacted, EEOC found discrimination in only 5 % of the cases - an incredible statistic. Is the data being manipulated?

THE GUILTY NOT PUNISHED

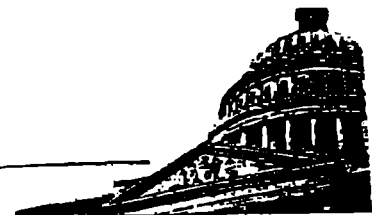
All 18 employees removed for discriminatory actions were discharged on the basis of sexual harassment; completely disregarding the discrimination against thousands of Black farmers, employee cases based on race and others.

- USDA continues to violate civil rights laws i.e., Titles VI and VII and does not hold those persons found guilty of discrimination ACCOUNTABLE.
- USDA's ACCOUNTABILITY Policy Implementation Document has been purposely stalled by top officials.
- USDA's April 2000 report entitled "Commitment to Progress" is a "Document of Deception."
- Increased reprisal, retaliation and hostile work environment continues and goes unchecked by USDA.

In order for USDA to regain Abraham Lincoln's designation as "The People's Department" it must be audited by Congress. An Oversight Committee needs to hold hearings on USDA's civil rights and its civil rights administrative process. USDA must be put into receivership to bring it into compliance with Titles VI and VII. It is clear that improvement will occur, only if the congress enacts laws making violators personally liable for discriminatory behaviors.

J.C. Watts, Jr.

Member, U.S. House of Representatives • Fourth District of Oklahoma



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Monday, June 19, 2000

Contact: Ron Bonjean/ Bill Shapard
(202) 225-5107/ 225-6165

WATTS CALLS ON HOUSE DEMS TO PUT POLITICS ASIDE AND JOIN IN FIGHT FOR BLACK FARMERS

Watts: "America's Black Farmers Deserve Our United Support."

WASHINGTON, DC — Speaking before a Black farmer rally held today on Capitol Hill, U.S. Rep. J.C. Watts, Jr. (R-Okla.) called upon House Democrats, including members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), to put politics aside and join in a bipartisan effort to help the Black farmers.

"Hundreds of black farmers have made the sacrifice and are here today to demand that they rightfully receive immediate financial relief from the U.S. Department of Agriculture," Watts said. "It's time for partisan politics to be put aside and for both Republicans and Democrats to join together to help America's Black farmers. Their plight deserves our full bipartisan attention on Capitol Hill."

Last month, CBC members urged their Democrat colleagues to vote against H. Con Res. 296, a resolution expressing the need to expedite the settlement process of discrimination claims filed by Black farmers against the USDA. The measure was defeated May 8th in a purely partisan vote of 216-180 with only 18 Democrats joining Republicans in voting for the resolution.

After receiving hundreds of letters from Black farmers, Watts announced at the rally that he intends to re-introduce H. Con Res. 296, and called upon CBC members and House Democrats to join him in making the measure bipartisan.

"America's Black farmers deserve our united support," Watts said. "We must reject those who attempt to play politics with their plight for purely political gain."

Led by the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association (BFAA), Black farmers from 10 southern states have been coming to Washington and protesting USDA's slow implementation of the court ordered consent decree in *Pigford v Glickman*, which has delayed many Black farmers from receiving their settlement.

On April 14 of last year, Judge Paul L. Friedman gave final approval to the settlement of a class action lawsuit filed by the BFAA against the USDA in the amount of \$50,000 for each qualified claimant. Their complaint alleged racial discrimination with regards to farm loans and other benefits by the USDA and other agencies between 1981 and 1997.

Watts also noted congressional help for Black farmers, including measures such as his Black Farmer Fairness Act (H.R. 2233), had been bipartisan until now.

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