

Minority Contractors, St. Louis Officials Sign Pact For Contracts

By Alvin A. Reid.
Special to the NNPA from the St. Louis American

ST. LOUIS (NNPA)—After a summer of heated allegations of racism and civil disobedience, minority contractors, MOKAN and the Concerned Citizens Coalition have cooled off and adopted a memorandum of understanding that all parties say will lead to more minority participation on current MetroLink expansion projects and future contracts.

Larry Salci, Metro CEO, said in a statement “we recognize minority contractors face a financial capacity problem in the St. Louis construction industry and have agreed to work together to help resolve it.”

“Financial barriers often prevent minority contractors from bidding on large public projects.”

The three parties have agreed to implement several “short- and long-termed goals” including:

Continuing to improve minority participation on existing cross-county contracts.

Increasing minority-bidding opportunities on remaining contracts by breaking them into smaller increments of work.

In cooperation with Mayor Francis Slay and County Executive

Buzz Westfall, an Economic Review Council will be formed to address problems, formulate strategies, make recommendations and identify opportunities for building capacity for minority disadvantaged businesses in the region.

Launching financial and lending institution support programs targeting bonding and working capital needs of small to medium-sized minority firms within 45 to 90 days of Metro projects.

Eddie Hasan, MOKAN executive director, said the agreement of understanding would end threats of continued civil disobedience at MetroLink stops.

“We got separate goals between African-American owned and women-owned businesses, and we got the goal from 20 percent combined to 30 percent,” Hasan said.

“Metro has also agreed to go back on existing contracts to identify any chances for minority firms to become involved on the contracts that have already been awarded.”

Hasan said the rewards would come in the future, if not immediately.

“Some people will say to me

after we make the announcement, ‘Is that all you got out of this?’ And others will ask Metro, ‘Why did you give anything up?’ I would say to the former, you couldn’t eat an elephant in one bite. I say to the latter that whatever you give, it will come back to you double or triple, especially when you invest in people,” Hasan said.

“So goes minority- and women-owned business, so goes the region. We must continue to re-commit ourselves to inclusion and diversity because these are the sources of our strength as a city and region.”

Hasan said the commitment is larger than just Metro’s agreement.

“It is a commitment from major stock holders in our region to help grow minority and female businesses and their capacity,” he said.

Earlier this summer, MOKAN and the concerned Citizens Coalition called on Metro to halt the award of a contract for the lack of minority participation on the Cross County MetroLink expansion. On two occasions individuals were arrested for blocking rails.

Protestors, including presidential candidate Al Sharpton, briefly interrupted MetroLink’s 10th birthday celebration recently.

NAACP Opposes Proposed Thurmond Memorial

By J. Zamgba Browne
Special to the NNPA from The Amsterdam News

NEW YORK (NNPA)—An aggressive movement in Congress to name the planned Visitor’s Center in Washington for the late Sen. Strom Thurmond is being vehemently opposed by the nation’s leading civil rights organization, the NAACP.

Congressman Gersham Barrett (R-S.C.) has already introduced a bill in the House of Representatives and one is expected soon in the Senate to be introduced by Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.). Construction of the center may cost as much as \$400 million, according to the NAACP, which opposes the bestowing of this high honor upon the late senator.

Thurmond, who died earlier this year, served in the U.S. Senate longer than any other member. But the NAACP said it is unfortunate that his 48 years on Capitol Hill

were marked by a “bigoted and segregationist” philosophy. During his tenure, “Thurmond was well known for giving exclusive representation to his White constituents, often at the expense of his constituents of color,” according to the NAACP. The civil rights organization has asked its members to write to their respective representatives in Congress asking them to vote against naming the Visitor’s Center for Thurmond, citing the following reasons:

*He holds a dubious record for the longest filibuster in congressional history, 24 hours and 18 minutes, in his attempt to derail passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act.

*In 1948, as a U.S. presidential candidate, Thurmond ran on a platform of states’ rights to preserve the “prerogatives of the people of a sovereign state to deal exclusively with domestic problems such as voting, qualifications for voting,

segregation, law enforcement and private employment.”

It was during this campaign that he reportedly told a group of supporters, “There’s not enough troops in the U.S. Army to force the Southern people to break down segregation and admit the nigger race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes and into our churches.”

The NAACP declared that the “U.S. Capitol is meant to be a building of people, all the people of the United States, and to name its visitors center after a man who fought so hard for exclusion and division is insulting to American citizens as well as the building itself.”

Thurmond’s record, the NAACP continued, “is one that should by no means be celebrated or commemorated; rather it should be studied in the history books as a lesson of hurt, hatred and divisiveness.”

Office of Black Augusta Paper Raided

By George E. Curry
WASHINGTON (NNPA)—The owner of the “Augusta Focus,” a Black weekly in Georgia, says a recent raid on his office by state and federal agencies was carried out to diminish his chances of obtaining \$6 million each year for printing the county’s legal notices.

The newspaper’s owner, former Georgia Senate Majority Leader Charles W. Walker, has been the target of several investigations, none of which have found him guilty of any crimes. He is president and CEO of the Walker Group, which owns the “August Focus,” a construction firm and a temporary employment agency.

“They tried to come after me with my temporary employment services, political influence and all of that and they couldn’t come up with anything, and now they’re trying this,” says Walker, who was defeated earlier this year in his bid to get re-elected after serving 12 years in the state Senate. In 1996, he became the first African-American to be elected majority leader of that body.

Ed Reinhold, supervising agent of the FBI’s office in Augusta, says the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the Internal Revenue Service, conducted the joint raid of Walker’s offices in Augusta.

“The warrant was sealed and continues to be sealed,” Reinhold says. “So, I can’t tell you what we were looking for or what we took.”

Walker says, “This investigation is being led by the FBI. What kind of federal interest is

involved here? None.”

Authorities are usually tight-lipped about an investigation at this stage. Generally, if they develop enough evidence to seek criminal charges, they will present it to a grand jury for consideration. If a grand jury agrees, it will issue an indictment that most likely will be made public.

Walker denies any wrongdoing.

“We started a major 34-billboard campaign to expand the circulation and distribution of the ‘Augusta Focus,’” Walker explains. “Now this is what the real deal is: We are going to apply to become the legal organ for Richmond County. And that’s why we got this investigation.”

The White-owned daily, the “Augusta Chronicle,” now prints all city and county legal notices.

“It’s worth about \$6 million annually,” Walker says. “Plus, you get all of those news subscribers and other people will want to advertise with you because of the larger subscriber base.”

In a front-page story last week, the “Augusta Focus” recounted a string of investigations that targeted Walker.

“The original probe started out with allegations contained in an article in the ‘Augusta Chronicle’ and the ‘Atlanta Journal-Constitution’ accusing former Senate Majority Leader Charles W. Walker of various ethics violations that were later dismissed,” the newspaper noted. “The allegations were that Walker had illegally done business with Grady Hospital and the Medical College of Georgia. These investigations obviously have

not produced the desired results.

“The feds then moved to an investigation of the non-profit CSRA [Black football] Classic where Walker serves as the honorary chairman. The status of that investigation is unknown.

“Now the feds have taken on seemingly a new project: The investigation of the ‘Augusta Focus.’ Some people close to the investigation have suggested that the outcome is not important. The goal is to financially ruin the Walker Group [which owns the Black, NNPA-affiliated paper] and its subsidiaries.”

In its story, the paper blames U.S. Attorney Richard Thompson, a Republican, for what it calls a politically motivated investigation into Walker, as well as other Democratic politicians.

Dan Drake, a public information officer for the U.S. Attorney’s office, declined to respond to those allegations or give any details of the investigation. “At this point, I can’t confirm or deny that there is an investigation,” he says.

Walker’s paper left no doubt that an investigation is underway.

“The FBI confiscation of all of the ‘Augusta Focus’s’ electronic files, including those from employees’ private laptops, raises serious constitutional questions,” the paper says. “How far can the government go in its attempt to neutralize news organizations which represent unpopular political or social views? If the ‘Augusta Focus’ is silenced today, who do they come for tomorrow?”

Amin’s Children in Family Feud Over Inheritance

By Gabriel Packard
JEDDAH, Saudi Arabia (IPS/GIN)—Dozens of the late Idi Amin’s 54 children are arguing over who will inherit his fortune, says his second-eldest son, Kirunda Amin.

But Kirunda, speaking to the BBC, said that the disputes are not out of control and that he hopes that the family can resolve the matter by following Islamic law.

“We shall rely on religious elders to distribute the wealth and choose the heir,” he said.

Idi Amin—who died Aug. 16 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, of multiple organ failure—is reported to have

had a personal fortune of millions of dollars stashed in Saudi banks. He also owned expensive cars and houses, including one in Uganda.

At least 22 of the children, many of whom live in the United States or Europe, have gone to Jedda to visit their father’s grave and to speak to one of Amin’s 13 wives, Hajat Madina, about who will be heir to the estate, say reports in Kenya’s Daily Nation newspaper.

An official from the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, established by Idi Amin while he was in power in Uganda, told the BBC that there was family conflict

over the wealth but that the children say they will follow Islamic law to resolve the matter.

“The council and the children have appointed a panel that will deal with the whole issue of inheritance,” said the official.

Amin seized power in Uganda in 1971, and his eight-year reign is considered one of the bloodiest in Africa’s history. An estimated 300,000 Ugandans were killed by his agents, and thousands more disappeared or were forced into exile.

Study Finds Women Own Bulk Of Swaziland’s Small Businesses

MBABANE, Swaziland (IRIN)—Swaziland’s women own nearly three-quarters of their country’s small businesses, according to a new government study. The figure flies in the face of conventional wisdom that Swazi women, because of their legal status as minors, are economically disenfranchised.

“We are capable business people, but we have been kept from advancing in big corporations. Small businesses allow women to apply their business skills and prosper, and these types of

businesses also offer time flexibility,” says Janice Simelane of the women’s empowerment group, Umtapo WaBomake.

Popular small businesses include general stores, poultry farms, beauty salons, dressmaking shops or agricultural businesses.

But “many Swazi women are finding their own financing, and they are opening newer types of businesses. We find women heading real estate agencies, private schools, public relations outfits and even their own law firms,” says Simelane.

The study by the Ministry of Enterprise and Employment found that 71 percent of small businesses listed with local and national tax authorities were registered under women’s names. This high figure is in spite of the fact that Swazi women cannot own property in their own names, enter into contracts, or secure bank loans without the sponsorship of a male relative.

The government seems committed to women’s empowerment, as evidenced by a draft constitution that would remove legal barriers now hindering women

Subconsultant Open House Jacobs Associates Engineers/Consultants

Monday, September 8
1:30 – 4:00 pm
The Coleman Building Conference Room
811 1st Avenue, 4th Floor, Seattle
206-682-0081

Let’s introduce ourselves and discuss teaming possibilities, specifically for King County’s Brightwater Conveyance project, as well as teaming for upcoming underground and heavy civil projects!

We provide specialty design and construction management of underground facilities, specifically tunnels, and construction disputes resolution for all types of projects. For more information visit www.jacobssf.com.

SEATTLE MONORAIL PROJECT

Networking Session

Design, Build, Operate and Maintain (DBOM) Opportunities

The Seattle Monorail Project (SMP) invites you to attend a networking session for the Project’s DBOM Process.

DATE, TIME, LOCATION

Wednesday, September 17, 6 - 9 p.m.
Seattle Central Community College
Rooms 1110 and 1111

AGENDA

6:00 - 6:30 p.m.
Registration
6:30 - 7:00 p.m.
Presentation
7:00 - 7:15 p.m.
Q & A
7:15 - 9:00 p.m.
Networking

Please join Seattle Monorail Project staff and over 1,200 invited participants including major consulting and sub-consulting firms related to the Project.

For more information contact Ray Finnen, SMP, at (206) 587-1798 or ray@elevated.org

seattlemedium.com