

Mayor Slights Black Business Despite Clergy Support

by Linn Washington

The African American Chamber of Commerce of Philadelphia is currently conducting talks with the Rendell Administration after a Chamber analysis of Rendell's budget and Five Year Financial Plan concluded Black business was being virtually excluded from inclusion in the multi-million dollar initiatives.

"I would have expected to see more in his budget," said Dennis Baxter, president of the African American Chamber of Commerce, while noting, "There is a sincere effort on the part of the Rendell Administration to work with us on our concerns."

The Chamber's analysis was released weeks prior to The Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity announcing their endorsement of Mayor Ed Rendell's reelection bid.

The Black Clergy sought no specific commitments from Mayor Rendell before bestowing their influential endorsement despite concerns of many in the Black community that issues from economic development to education are not being adequately

addressed.

Black Clergy President, Rev. Joseph D. Patterson Jr., said the organization that represents more than 400 churches and ministries throughout the city, did not seek commitments from Rendell on issues like economic development and education.

"The one commitment we did ask is that he be fair," Rev. Patterson said during an interview last week. "We asked to be included on major decisions and that he have an open door. That is the only commitment we asked for."

Reverend Patterson said he was not aware of the African American Chamber's analysis of Rendell's fiscal plans. Patterson said because he was not familiar with the Chamber's findings, it would be unfair to the "integrity of the Clergy and Mr. Rendell to comment" on the analysis.

(continued on page 18)

Mayor Slights Black Business

(continued from page 1)

The seeming failure of the Black Clergy to obtain commitments on specific issues in exchange for the considerable clout of its endorsement is being questioned. One community activist termed the no-strings-attached endorsement a "lack of leadership." African American Chamber President Baxter simply said if the Black Clergy had concerns "it was time to put them on the table" before issuing the endorsement.

Baxter said the Chamber's analysis expressed the concerns of its membership and was not a "criticism" of Mayor Rendell.

David Cohen, Rendell's Chief of Staff, said the Mayor is committed to working with the African American Chamber.

"There is complete agreement between the Mayor and the African American Chamber that an essential component of this city's economic growth is the African American business community," Cohen said this week.

The African American Chamber, based on its analysis, called on Rendell to: increase the amount of contractual business African-Americans conduct with city government; increase the amount of Professional Services Contracts available to African-American businesses; take the lead in establishing a more inclusive attitude among large

corporations who receive city contracts and increasing Black business representation on the boards of city economic development entities.

The Rendell Administration does not initiate efforts on behalf of African-American businesses, contended one City Hall source who did say the Administration is response-oriented and has responded positively when approached.

Chief of Staff Cohen said the Administration is making considerable progress on a number of fronts despite the current climate where affirmative action programs are being attacked in the courts and legislative bodies.

Cohen cited an array of statistics including a ten percent increase in the number of professional services contracts to Black-owned law firms and investment bankers during the past two years, an eleven percent increase in Black participation in city contracts "across the board" during the past year, \$80 million earmarked for a number of Black businesses and organizations in the city's Stimulus Package and pending changes in contract language designed to stimulate increased utilization of minorities by private sector businesses.

"I'm not trying to say we are where we want to be, but given the tough legal environment, we are making improvements and will continue to make improvements," Cohen said.

Baxter of the Chamber said it is "too early to tell the outcomes" of the ongoing meetings with city officials.