

1999 BIG JOINS FORCES WITH OTHER FEDERAL EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY GROUPS

BIG NATIONAL PRESIDENT GERALD REED AND LEGISLATIVE CHAIR RAWL KING MEET ON CAPITAL HILL IN DC WITH CARCLE EXC-DIRECTOR MATTHEW FOGG

PRESIDENT LAWRENCE LUCAS TO VOICE CONCERNS FOR RACIAL FAIRNESS IN GOVERNMENT 'DOWNSIZING' AND 'CONTRACTING OUT' OF FEDERAL WORKERS

Changes threaten 'good gov't jobs'

WASHINGTON—Government employee groups, trade unions, and civil rights organizations—led by BIG (Blacks in Government) and Rep. Albert Wynn (D-Md.)—are uniting to pressure Congress and the Clinton administration to change the “reinvention of government” they insist is hurting their members.

“We will come back in January 2000, until someone understands that BIG and the coalition of organizations assembled here today are serious about addressing our livelihoods as public servants in these times of downsizing and contracting out,” BIG National President Gerald R. Reed said at a Capitol Hill brainstorming session Nov. 18.

The coalition may be one of the most diverse ever assembled, according to Rep. Wynn, who stressed that the new movement’s unity will empower the various members who have been “doing the same thing, but over in a corner of the room by themselves.”

In addition to the government-wide, budgetary problems involved in government downsizing, Blacks and other non-whites have more EEO and racial discrimination problems, he said. They are also disproportionately victims of a lack of promotions and a lack of training. Then, just as when any other employees complain, they are often retaliated against.

The case of Cathy Harris, a Customs Agency employee in Atlanta who exposed racist practices against Blacks arriving

into the country, was one of the most frightening discussed at the meeting.

“The Department of Customs, under the Treasury Department, is being permitted to abuse Black women when they come in from overseas,” said Arthuretta H. Martin, chair of BIG’s Equal Employment Opportunity Committee.

Ms. Harris testified before two House Committees, and to a Government Accounting Office (GAO) investigation in May and July of this year, “that Black women were handcuffed to beds when they came in from overseas. Laxatives were poured down their throats, forced by Customs people, so that they would possibly pass drugs,” Ms. Martin said. Customs officials, she continued, wanted to accuse Black and Hispanic women of bringing drugs into this country.

Investigations “found all of (Ms. Harris’s) allegations were credible,” Ms. Martin said. A law was enacted restricting the time that the Customs Agency can hold citizens to only 24 hours before permitting the detained person to contact family members or an attorney as a result of the testimony by Ms. Harris, she said.

But when her agency found out that BIG had organized federal workers to donate leave time to Ms. Harris—who has been away from her job on stress leave—the government attempted to fire her. “In less than three days, they issued her a letter, saying that they were



(L-R) U.S. Marshal Matthew Fogg; Lawrence Lucas; BIG National President Gerald S. Reed; Rawle King, Chair of BIG’s National Legislative Review Committee; and Michael L. Rious, Legislative Assistant for Rep. Albert R. Wynn (D-Md.).

going to fire her, based on disclosures she supposedly made,” regarding these inhuman practices to an Atlanta television station, said Ms. Martin.

Ms. Harris’s situation is all too typical, coalition members reported. “There is a real common ground between EEO reprisal victims and whistleblower reprisal victims,” said Tom Devine, legal director of the Government Accountability Project, which defends the rights of whistle-blowers, who expose corruption and mismanagement in the workplace. “Very frequently the issues are

overlapping.”

Workers are virtually defenseless against the bureaucracy, he said, because the provisions written into the law back in 1912 protecting whistle-blowers have no legal enforcement remedies, and have been dismissed in every court case brought since then.

“Somebody talked about being able to stand up, but yet: ‘you’ve got to keep a clean record.’ You can’t keep a clean record if I’m in law enforcement and I’m going to come and get you,” said former U.S. Marshal Matthew Fogg, executive director of the Congress Against Racism and Corruption in Law Enforcement. “Have you ever

heard somebody say that you can indict a ham sandwich? That can happen. This is serious. When Blacks in Government really starts making a dent, I guarantee they will look into your tax files and everything else. And they will use us, against us.”

Mr. Fogg urged the coalition members to fight all the way to victory rather than accepting monetary, out-of-court settlements—or as he called them, “plea bargains”—before their cases are won. A jury awarded Mr. Fogg \$4 million—which he has yet to collect—in his discrimination lawsuit.

—Askia Muhammad