

ISSUE UPDATE



NAACP VICTORY

DATE: December 10, 2010

TO: Concerned Parties

FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director,
NAACP Washington Bureau

PRESIDENT OBAMA SIGNS HISTORIC BILL FUNDING PIGFORD II RACIAL DISCRIMINATION SETTLEMENT FOR AMERICAS BLACK FARMERS

**BILL ALSO CONTAINS REPAYMENT TO NATIVE AMERICANS UNDER COBELL
SETTLEMENT FOR THE MISMANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES ON
NATIVE**

THE ISSUE:

On December 8, 2010, President Barack Obama signed historic legislation funding a settlement, known as "Pigford II" between the US Department of Agriculture and American Black farmers, many of whom had suffered decades of discrimination. The NAACP enthusiastically supported this legislation as this case had festered for years and too many black farmers lost their livelihoods, their farms, and too often their lives awaiting resolution.

On November 30, by a vote of 256 to 152, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to appropriate the \$1.25 billion necessary to fund the Pigford II settlement between Black farmers and the U.S. government. Specifically, this bill will fund the settlement announced in February of this year between the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Justice and as many as 70,000 African American farmers, many of whom suffered blatant racial discrimination at the hands of the U.S. Department of Agriculture for decades, with cash damage awards and debt relief. Special thanks goes to House Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, and House Whip Clyburn for their leadership in ushering this crucial legislation through passage for a third time.

Passage of this bill caps off a struggle which many African American farmers have been waging for decades. President Obama, Agriculture Secretary Vilsack and Attorney General Holder deserve great credit for moving this settlement forward, as it has festered and was effectively dormant for years.

More recently, funding for Pigford II had been stalled in the U.S. Senate. The money was approved of by the US House twice before this year, only to have it stripped out of bills by the Senate. Credit goes to Senators Harry Reid (NV) and Charles Grassley (IA) for their diligence. On November 19, 2010, we surmounted a huge hurdle when the Senate passed the bill funding the Pigford II settlement by unanimous consent.

After years of discriminatory treatment by USDA credit and program agencies, these farm families have already waited almost a decade for compensation for these well-established claims. Secretary Vilsack summed it up well, "I'm proud of the many critical steps we've taken in the past months to right the wrongs of the past, but more work remains to be done. I have put into action an all-encompassing program to correct our past errors, learn from those mistakes, and outline definitive action to ensure there will be no missteps in the future. The process has been long and often difficult, but we can't wait any longer to close this sad chapter in USDA's history.