



Why is it harder for African Americans to meet with the President?

To: President Joe Biden

C/O: Cedric Richmond/ Nia Page

The White House

Senior Advisor and Director, Office of Public Engagement

Dear President Biden,

I have been attempting to bring a serious issue to your attention for over eleven months. After almost two years of enduring obstacle after entrenched racist obstacle, my company cannot seem to resolve the inequities inherent in the procurement and governmental process surrounding Covid-19 PPE. Just recently HHS has placed a set-aside request for bids in the SAM.gov website. The set-aside is for Native American businesses. Our research indicates there are no Native American manufacturers of the desired PPE listed in the RFB (Request for Bid). Therefore, we have entered a bid as the only actual manufacturer of the requested products owned and operated by minority women of color.

The system is broken to the detriment of African American owned businesses, especially women owned and operated ones such as ours.

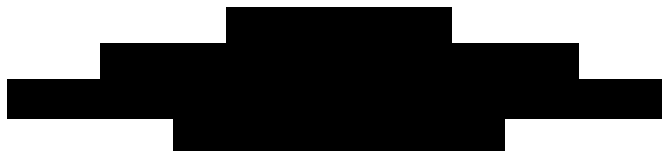
My company still holds millions of pieces of face shields, goggles and antigen test kits in warehouses located in Chicagoland area.

Yet a RFB is set aside for a Native American owned business. This makes no logical sense, especially when the department seeking the goods is aware of our inventory.

It appears that the government procurement system is creating impediments to prevent African American owned businesses such as ours from supplying the needed goods at pre-pandemic pricing.

Entrenched problems with government actions are easier to ignore than to be fixed. For the last two years we have been victimized by our government's failure to address the inequities in the procurement process as demonstrated in its latest RFB described previously. We have tried to bring attention to this problem in every manner we know. Yet, we continue to be ignored and no action is taken to remedy the situation as demonstrated in the latest described procurement request listed on SAM.gov.

It is extraordinarily insulting to watch News reports yesterday that a boy band from South Korea, BTS had an in-person meeting with President Biden. As a long time, Democrat and Civil rights warrior, as well as a legendary entertainer that has met with President Biden many times in my life, the difficulty of setting up a meeting with him over these issues makes no sense. It appears as if only youth-oriented artists even if they are not Americans will be greeted in the "people's house" by our President. I know it is always harder for African Americans to get justice and fair level playing fields in business, but this is





becoming ludicrous. When a South Korean based boy band is welcomed at the White House before an African American woman that suffered indignities of the Jim Crow South while touring with Sam Cook, and other legendary African American entertainers that stood next to the Reverend Martin Luther King and stared down racism firsthand. This is too much to tolerate.

Are the problems associated with African Americans not equal to those of other races? Why do we have to be last?

I have spent the last eleven months requesting help in fixing the problem. I have been very cognizant that the President is a very busy man and provided every opportunity for the Administration to find the time to meet with me to discuss the problem and find possible solutions. I have sent multiple letters delineating the problem with attached research demonstrating that my claims are justified. The problem is real as demonstrated now through this latest SAM.gov RFB. Yet, no meeting has been scheduled to date. Instead, I am informed that Selena Gomez and BTS have been granted access in days not months of effort. I am sure they represent worthy causes, but why do the problems of African Americans have to take a backseat. Why has a meeting with President Biden been denied or slow walked for me? I have been welcomed at the White House many times before.

I can only conclude that this Administration does not want to address this serious problem. I have avoided publicity on this issue because I whole heartedly support this Administration and President Biden personally. I cannot believe that President Biden is intentionally ignoring my request for an appointment to discuss this matter. Everyday that passes is another lost opportunity for an African American owned business to participate in the delivery and sale of needed goods to our government.

My patience has been exhausted. Please provide me a few possible dates for a zoom or in-person meeting with President Biden.

Thank you,

Gladys Knight
Empress Of Soul
President
Riccino Optical, Inc.
[REDACTED]

Shani Burton Johnson
CEO
Riccino Optical, Inc.

CC: Reverend Al Sharpton, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Michael Eric Dyson, President Barack Obama. Senator Dick Durbin
[REDACTED]