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URGENT ISSUE UPDATE / ACTION ALERT

DATE: December 31, 2010
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director,
NAACP Washington Bureau

**URGENT!!!!
Immediate Action
Needed!**

US SENATE PASSES NAACP-SUPPORTED FUNDING FOR PIGFORD II BLACK FARMER RACIAL DISCRIMINATION LAWSUIT SETTLEMENT

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

THE ISSUE:

In February of this year the US Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Justice announced a settlement to provide 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. This settlement is known as the Pigford II settlement. Sadly, efforts to appropriate the \$1.25 billion necessary to fund Pigford II have consistently stalled in the U. S. Senate (the money has twice been approved by the U.S. House so far this year, only to be struck both times by the Senate). These claims cannot even begin to be investigated, let alone settled, until after Congress has appropriated the funding. Similarly, the \$1.41 billion needed to fund an agreement between the US Department of Interior and Native American Indians over centuries of land abuse and mismanagement by the US government and lost royalty funds, known as the Cobell settlement, had heretofore been stalled in the United States Senate.

Late in the evening of November 19, 2010, however, and due in large part to the consistent efforts of Senators Harry Reid (NV), Chuck Grassley (IA) and others the United States Senate passed a bill to fund the Pigford II and Cobell settlements. The bill must pass the House of Representatives before the Congress adjourns in December, and will then go to the President for his signature.

There is an urgency to pass this appropriation to settle the class action lawsuits of African-American farmers and Native Americans. Many of the farmers who would qualify for monies under the settlement have waited as long as 10 years to be compensated; some have already died or lost their farms. 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. It is time to allow these farmers to focus on the future, and move forward unencumbered by the racial discrimination of the past.

**THE NAACP URGES THE HOUSE TO NOW ACT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO FULLY
FUND THE PIGFORD II AND COBELL SETTLEMENTS. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!!!**

[More...](#)

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact your Representative and **URGE THEM TO SUPPORT FULL FUNDING FOR THE PIGFORD II AND COBELL SETTLEMENTS.** To contact your Representative, you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to his or her office. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

Write a Letter

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:
The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

No time
to mail a
letter!
Call, fax
or e-mail
today!

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Representative's office (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for his or her fax number (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on "Write Your Representative" (on the left hand side, just under "find your Representative"). This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

THE MESSAGE

- The Pigford II settlement would provide 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. These claims cannot even begin to be investigated, let alone settled, until after Congress has appropriated the funding.
- The Senate has finally acted! Now is the time for the House to pass the bill and send it to the President
- In the Cobell case, the federal government mismanaged billions of dollars in oil, gas, grazing, timber and other royalties overseen by the Department of Interior for Indian trustees since 1887.
- The federal government must take affirmative steps to correct the centuries of injustice against African American farmers and Native Americans.
- There is an urgency to pass this appropriation to settle the class action lawsuit of African-American farmers; many of the farmers who would qualify for monies under the settlement have waited as long as 10 years to be compensated; some have already died or lost their farms.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!

If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

MEMBERSHIP IS POWER! JOIN THE NAACP TODAY.

To become an NAACP member or to sign up for e-mail legislative and press updates, visit www.naacp.org

Sample Letter

(date)

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**RE: STRONG SUPPORT FOR FUNDING FOR THE PIGFORD II AND
COBELL SETTLEMENTS TO HELP BLACK FARMERS AND NATIVE
AMERICANS**

Dear Representative _____;

As your constituent, I strongly urge you to support the swift enactment of legislation which will fund the Pigford II settlement between the US Department of Agriculture and black farmers, many of whom suffered decades, if not lifetimes, of racially discriminatory abuse at the hands of the USDA. I also urge you to fully fund the Cobell settlement, in which the federal government mismanaged billions of dollars in oil, gas, grazing, timber and other royalties overseen by the Department of Interior for Indian trustees since 1887. The federal government must take affirmative steps to correct the centuries of injustice against African American farmers and Native Americans.

The funding has finally moved out of the Senate. The House must act now, and send the bill to the President's desk, before the end of the session!

As you may be aware, as many as 70,000 African American farmers, many of whom suffered blatant discrimination at the hands of the U.S. Department of Agriculture for decades, will receive cash damage awards and debt relief under the settlement announced by Secretary Vilsack and Attorney General Holder in February of this year. Under the new settlement, a non-judicial claims process through which individual farmers may demonstrate their entitlement to cash damages awards and debt relief was established pending an appropriation of \$1.25 billion by Congress. The U.S. House of Representatives had included funding for Pigford II in its version of the Supplemental Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2010, funding which included revenue and spending offsets to cover the costs so this expenditure would not have added to the budget deficit. Sadly, this money was eliminated by the Senate and ultimately not replaced.

As I am sure you are aware, there is an urgency to pass this appropriation to settle the class action lawsuit of African-American farmers. 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. It is time to allow these farmers to focus on the future, and move forward unencumbered by the racial discrimination of the past.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter and for all you are doing to help correct this historical wrong. I look forward to hearing from you to let me know what you are doing and to let me know what I can do to help you in this struggle.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)