

Failed Legislation stops Black Farmer's Settlement



The ire that black farmers and their advocates are currently feeling has two targets: the Senate's failure to vote the money to complete the farmers' settlement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and President Obama's recent generous offer to white Arkansas farmers. Both examples of political expediency are bitter reminders of black farmers' second-class status.

For five months, the Senate has blocked passage of legislation that contains money to fund the USDA's \$1.25 billion settlement of the second bias suit lodged by blackfarmers. The agreement, called Pigford II, is supposed to redress past USDA racial discrimination cases.

In 1997 Pigford I, the first USDA settlement, provided 13,000 farmers with \$50,000 each and debt relief. Timothy Pigford, a North Carolina farmer, and 400 other African Americans had filed a class-action suit against the USDA, alleging bias in allocation of farm loans and assistance. For decades their complaints were ignored or got a slow response. Pigford II occurred after the USDA admitted that thousands of other black farmers' claims from

the 1990s went uninvestigated.

John Boyd, founder and president of the National Black Farmers Association, says that bills to fund the settlement have failed seven times in the Senate, and a black-farmer attachment was taken out of the recent farm-aid disaster bill. "We have been working on our restitution for 26 years," Boyd says. In August alone, Senate Republicans blocked the settlement twice. Gary R. Grant, president of the Black Farmers and Agriculturalists Association, asks, "Don't these legislators in states suffering economically know the money will boost the income in their state?"

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The Grace of Silence by Michele Norris

Hell's Diva by Anna J

Mother Wit by Dera Williams and Angelia Menchan

Some Sing, Some Cry by Ntozake Shange

Stranger Here Below by Joyce Hinnefeld

The following books by African American authors have been suggested for great reading. Terry McMillan's "Getting To Happy", tops the list, with "Mother Wit", by Dera Williams and Angelia Menchan close second.

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