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Why Won't NY Governor Paterson Respect Black Self-Help?



By Kermit Eady

June 22, 2008

My question is inspired by the Governor's contemptuous disregard for the glaring need to reestablish the Black United Fund of New York, an organization that was vital to the empowerment of the black community.

As you know, Councilman Charles Baron and I sent letters on January 14 to then Governor Eliot Spitzer and Attorney General Andrew Cuomo requesting a meeting to discuss the destruction of BUFNY and the need to revive this much needed organization. As of March 17, when Spitzer fell from power, we had heard from neither official. On April 15, the Councilman and I forcefully made our case for BUFNY's rebirth in letters to the newly sworn-in Governor Paterson.

As of June 3rd, we had heard nothing from the Governor, a man who owes his political life to the black community from which he came. So, I called Governor

Paterson on that date, and I was assured by his secretary that he would get my message. The following day, I did receive a call from the Governor's aide David Johnson, who informed me that Paterson had asked him to tell me that as Governor, he could not do a thing about the BUFNY situation because BUFNY's destruction took place under Spitzer's watch. He said I should take my concerns to Attorney General Cuomo.

I told Johnson that I was surprised to learn that the Governor was so misinformed as to not understand that the crimes and injustices committed by Spitzer as The Attorney General of the State were in essence crimes and injustices committed by the state. As Attorney Alton Maddox recently said on the radio program, [The Empowerment Hour On-Line University](#), the Attorney General is the state's lawyer and therefore the Governor's lawyer. Thus, Governor Paterson has the power to bring justice where injustice was perpetrated.

On June 5th, we learned of an article that had appeared in the Daily News the previous day under this headline: "[Paterson Makes Peace with Another Spitzer Enemy](#)." The piece reported that Paterson had met with Maurice Hank Greenberg, whom Spitzer targeted and forced to step down as head of AIG when Spitzer was Attorney General and known as the "White Knight of Wall Street." (Spitzer's office later dropped civil charges against Greenberg.) The article noted that Paterson had thanked Greenberg for investments in medical and science research—including some that relate to visual impairment. They talked, too, about how they might work together.

The irony is not lost on us that on the very day that Governor Paterson sent his aide to inform me that he won't meet with me because he can't do a thing about reestablishing BUFNY, he saw fit to make peace with one of Spitzer's white enemies. Clearly, the Governor sees it as in his interest to work with Greenberg. But why can't he understand that it is in his interest—and by extension, in the interest of the state and nation—to work with an independent organization of integrity that is dedicated to empowering the African-American community? What is he afraid of? It is very difficult to understand the Governor. At a meeting he called that I attended, he expressed his outrage and anger towards then AG Eliot Spitzer for his destruction of

BUFNY. In front of several witnesses, he said that he would hold legislative hearings against Spitzer for his illegal, outrageous actions against BUFNY. However, about a year later we learned that Paterson was joining Spitzer as his running mate in the gubernatorial campaign. Mr. Paterson, please explain.

As the state and the nation struggle to find their way out of the current economic mess, Gov. Paterson could serve as an innovative leader by throwing his support behind an institution that practices economic development and self-help in the black community. He wouldn't be taking a risk. In fact, BUFNY, with its long track record of success, would make the Governor look good. Through BUFNY, African Americans have taken pride in seeing their dollars provide jobs, as well as more than 400 units of affordable housing. The Black United Fund of NY also built institutions, and provided a range of services, including communication (WCKL radio station), technological (high-tech buildings and tech centers), technical assistance, grants and much more.

BUFNY did all of this and more with very few contributions coming from sources outside of the black community. We did it without receiving one dime from Mayor Bloomberg's and then Attorney General Spitzer's "slush funds" that put more than \$100,000 in the pockets of Covenant House, a charity that Forbes magazine reported gave only 15 percent of its money to program services and 85 percent to administration—the worst grant-to-administration ratio by a charity in the country. We did it without receiving one dime from politicians like Kathleen Quinn and others who doled out big money to their favorite charities, including many bogus ones.

We did it with the dollars of everyday black people who rightly saw their contributions as an investment in their own community, as an investment in themselves.

Yet, despite the promise of progress and self-empowerment that BUFNY offered to African-Americans—or perhaps *because* of that promise of progress and self-empowerment—the organization was targeted and destroyed, and Governor Paterson, who has the power to breathe new life into BUFNY, has decided to do nothing while our community suffers.

Why won't Governor Paterson respect black self-help?

I would also like to thank NYS Assemblyman Karim Camara for joining in the effort to push Governor Paterson to do the right thing.

Members of the public are encouraged to contact Governor Paterson and ask him to "do the right thing" and restore the Black United Fund of NY to the community.

Please Call the Governor at 518-474-8390 or Write to the Governor David A. Paterson, State Capitol, Albany, NY 12224

For more information, please visit

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