

Gov. Rauner receives Fletcher Award from National Black Chamber of Commerce

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WASHINGTON — The National Black Chamber of Commerce (NBCC) today gave its prestigious Arthur A. Fletcher Lifetime Achievement Award to Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner. The award is conferred on leaders who, in NBCC's estimation, have demonstrated an undeniable commitment to diversity in the procurement sector.

The award was presented by Larry Ivory, a previous Fletcher Award winner and the CEO of the Illinois Black Chamber of Commerce.

"In this decade, there has been no elected official who has done more for the development of Black-owned businesses than Gov. Bruce Rauner," said Harry Alford, NBCC co-founder and CEO.

"His example is one for all elected officials to emulate," added NBCC co-founder Kay DeBow. "His sheltered markets program and his recent executive order addressing procurement fairness for Black-owned businesses in Illinois demonstrate his dedication to diversity and the role that business plays in achieving enterprise and, ultimately, social objectives."

Rauner told attendees gathered for the 26th Annual NBCC Conference in Washington, D. C., that business development transforms people, families, neighborhoods and communities through ownership and employment.

"It is a strategy we are using in Illinois to help lift quality of life as well as reduce poverty and violence," he said. "It is a three-pronged strategy that involves education, enterprise development, and capital access. The idea is to build employment by preparing people for work in the 21st century economy and building minority businesses to hire them."

During the program, a number of Rauner's initiatives were highlighted. His education program has pumped \$1.4 billion of new funding into Illinois school systems. The increase came along with a new school funding formula that distributes state funds based on need.

He created sheltered market programs in the state so that only businesses owned by women, minorities and people with disabilities could bid on contracts in sectors where minorities were grossly underrepresented. Rauner signed an executive order this year stipulating that state contracts be canceled if minority participation goals are not met.

With the fairness moves, Rauner has added programs to help Black-owned businesses compete more effectively for state contracts. He's also helped to support entrepreneurs and expand career pathways for disadvantaged youth through technical education, apprenticeships and community college and workforce training programs.

Finally, the governor has moved to make capital more accessible through low-interest loan programs, investment programs to strengthen startups and small businesses, and greater participation in the state's capital access programs for business.

The governor's programs are producing results. At the Illinois Tollway, total payments to African-American-owned professional services firms has increased by 142 percent since 2015, when he took office. At the state's Central Management Services Department, African-American businesses have seen \$32.7 million in growth under its business enterprise programs.

Ivory commended the governor for his pro-Black business stance. "We have made substantial progress in Illinois," he said. "The governor has worked with us every step of the way. He understands what we need to overcome barriers and he is helping us get the tools we need to succeed."

"We have a long way to go; our job is far from done," Rauner said. "The levels of unemployment in Black neighborhoods are unacceptable. We need to get the Illinois economy growing faster to accomplish our minority business goals faster."

There are 2.6 million Black-owned businesses in the United States. Black businesses account for over \$138 billion in revenue each year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The National Black Chamber of Commerce[®] is dedicated to economically empowering and sustaining African-American communities through entrepreneurship and capitalistic activity within the United States.

NBCC has approximately 151 active chapters in the United States; 40 are in the developmental stage and 50 chapters are offshore.