

'Runaway train' quite costly

Written by Neil A. Davis, Gothenburg
Thursday, 16 May 2013 13:54 -

In an August-2010 letter, I mentioned a USDA employee who made (supposed) racial statements at an NAACP gathering. Shirley Sherrod (a black woman), spoke of how she didn't use the full force of what she could do in helping a white farmer get a farm loan. A video of this was posted by Tea Party activist Andrew Breitbart on his website. When it became news, Sherrod was hurriedly ordered to resign by Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack. The NAACP released the statement "We are appalled by her actions... her actions were shameful." Sherrod said she was taken out of context and claims were made that Breitbart had doctored the video.

When the full video surfaced, the NAACP reversed its statement saying they were snookered by Fox News & Breitbart. However, Breitbart had posted his video as he had received it (unedited on his part). Because the NAACP had constantly been calling the Tea Party racist, Breitbart wanted to show where racism really lives. The video showed how the audience was laughing and applauding as Sherrod described how she maltreated the white farmer. They didn't know her speech was ultimately going to be about redemption.

Attackers accused Breitbart of wanting to destroy Sherrod for her role in "Pigford." Having never heard of Pigford, Breitbart began to do more research (my hero). A Google search for "U.S. Opens Spigot" returns a New York Times article that completely vindicates the late great patriot Andrew Breitbart for the work he did exposing this story. His attackers are silent.

Pigford vs. Glickman (1999) was a class action lawsuit against the USDA, alleging racial discrimination against black farmers seeking farm loans between 1983 & 1997. Because few records remained for verification, claimants were not required to present evidence that they had been unfairly treated or had even tried to farm. It became a magnet for fraud, by its very design encouraged people to lie. In 16 ZIP codes in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi and North Carolina, the number of successful claimants exceeded the total number of farms operated by people of any race. Thousands received \$50,000 payments.

Congress overrode President George Bush's veto of the 2008 farm bill, which had a provision allowing late filers to bring new lawsuits. Discrimination suits were brought by Native American, Hispanic and female farmers, but Congress had appropriated only \$100 million for compensation.

President Barack Obama was more than willing to accommodate. His political appointees at the

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Justice and Agriculture Departments engineered a legally questionable way to sidestep Congress (a now common occurrence) by raiding \$1.33 billion from a special Treasury Department account, known as the Judgment Fund. A Treasury Department official said, the fund is not politically accessible, only legally accessible. Calling the action "...a license to raid the till."

In the past five years, a runaway train, driven by racial politics, pressure from influential members of Congress and law firms that stand to gain more than \$130 million in fees, has grown to encompass more than 90,000 people who have filed claims. The total cost could top \$4.4 billion.