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Contacts:

John F. Robinson, President & CEO, NMBC, (212)693-5050 / info@nmbc.org

**Minority-owned businesses send Washington their 2011 Wish List:
Resolve in the New Year to Give Us a Seat at the Table**

*By John F. Robinson, President & CEO
National Minority Business Council*

Barack Obama successfully campaigned on the promise of “change.” Record-breaking numbers of supporters showed up at his campaign stops chanting candidate Obama’s slogan: “Yes We Can!” They included many minorities, women, first-time voters, and individuals who had become disenfranchised by politics and policies that favored big corporations and deep-pocketed individuals who could buy influence.

The President’s honeymoon with the American people was short-lived as evidenced by his precipitous drop in approval ratings and the mid-term election results. Now, more “change” awaits us. What dampened the promise of his awe-inspiring campaign was summed up in early December with the publication of “The Moment of Truth,” a report of the bipartisan National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform. It tackled the hard decisions that politicians, government administrators, and the American public will have to make and live with in order to right the course of the country’s wobbly economy while still battling two long-raging wars. These changes – most importantly, reducing and, eventually, altogether eliminating the Federal government’s dependence on loans from foreign countries – are critical for restoring an economic vitality that this country has not enjoyed since the turn of the century.

The National Minority Business Council (www.nmbc.org), an organization that was founded during the first Nixon administration, endorses the Commission’s directive of taking drastic actions to reduce government debt. It represents mostly small businesses operated by people of color, women and veterans. Its members are expert at controlling overhead, juggling

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job responsibilities, managing cash flow, providing extraordinary customer service, and going the extra mile to keep and satisfy customers. These entrepreneurs offer much experience in how to stay afloat, get out of debt and make a profit. As a result, they have earned a “seat at the table” in the on-going discussion of government fiscal reform.

Back in August, President Obama met with small business owners in Seattle. “Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and the cornerstones of our communities,” he told the assembled crowd. “They do not have time for political games. They’re not interested in what’s best for a political party. They’re interested in what’s best for their employees and their communities and for the country.” It would be naïve for any individual or group to suggest that because the election is past and there will be a change of leadership in the House of Representatives, the game of politics is over. Far from it. Consider the November elections just a scrimmage, a pre-season game that won’t even count between now and 2012 when the “change” that Candidate Obama proselytized may really occur.

The President recently “made nice” with CEOs of some of the country’s leading corporations in an attempt to repair the damage he caused by referring to “fat cat bankers.” This time, he shifted his focus to big business partnering with the government and playing a critical role in creating jobs for America to stimulate the economy. Surprisingly, despite the recession, big business is in its best financial situation in more than 50 years. Collectively, America’s biggest corporations have been hoarding an estimated \$2 trillion dollars in assets, according to a recent headline in The Wall Street Journal.

“The Moment of Truth” recommendations states another obvious fact: “Our challenge is clear and inescapable: America cannot be great if we go broke. Our businesses will not be able to grow and create jobs, and our workers will not be able to compete successfully for the jobs of the future without a plan to get this crushing debt burden off our backs.” Who wouldn’t agree with this assessment?

A harder pill to swallow for some is the recommendation that “Every aspect of the (2011) discretionary budget must be scrutinized, no agency can be off limits, and no program that spends too much or achieves too little can be spared. The federal government can and must adapt to the 21st century of transforming itself into a leaner and more efficient operation. Like its citizens, government must also be willing to do more with less and live within its means.”

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Again, the NMBC has no argument with this recommendation, with one caveat: *Can* the federal government really make this transition? A primary contributor to the ballooning of the Federal budget is the growth of duplicitous government services. Governments at all levels should take note that entrepreneurs, in particular, are masters of multi-tasking under a single job title in order to service and keep their customers. Entrepreneurs must wear many hats to deliver as many services as possible that their customers demand, in order to hold onto their business. This will be a hard pill to swallow for some career politicians and long-time civil servants.

Entrepreneurial business owners have always dealt with the issues that have especially challenged big government in recent years but which it has not squarely attacked until recently. Their expertise in stretching the dollar, juggling assets, staying ahead of their liabilities, and keeping their doors open for business warrants a closer scrutiny and an embrace by Washington. “The Moment of Truth” is indeed upon us and the *truth* of the matter is that it is time for Washington, as well as state government officials, to embrace the empirical expertise of all Americans. Minority and women-owned businesses are often the strongest survivors in a tough economy. The value of their experience and instinct should not be discounted in the search for viable and sustainable solutions for fixing our very broken economy.

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About National Minority Business Council (NMBC): Founded in 1972 as a full-service, non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, NMBC is dedicated to providing business assistance, educational opportunities, and professional development to minority, women and veteran-owned businesses.