It’s a matter of agreement

Like AWCI, Women in Construction can’t understand how the government could exclude them from making decisions

From all over the country, AWCI has been receiving letters of support and appreciation for its criticism of the federal government’s failure to include Women in Construction in the decision-making process involving their future.

In November, AWCI Executive Vice President Joe M. Baker used the editorial forum of Construction Dimensions to express his concern that the matter of setting goals for the employment of more women in construction had become an example “of moving right ahead with predictable government highhandedness.”

Baker’s editorial noted that the Department of Labor had established a task force to review government goals for putting more women on the scaffold in our industry and throughout construction. “And who composes this task force?” Baker asked.

“Is it made up of the people in the know? Not quite. Would you believe that for a project as important as this, Uncle Sam has tapped the doubtful resources of such groups as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and—Would you believe?—the YWCA!”

“Outstanding by its absence is the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) . . . the largest, oldest and, importantly, the most creditable of all women’s groups in construction,” Baker noted.

NAWIC is the only association composed entirely of women in construction. It has about 8,500 members in 250 chapters across the U.S. The group had taken a realistic look at the problems of keeping women involved in the long haul recruitment, training and maintaining of industry personnel, and it expressed some concern over the goals and timetables being advanced by government forces.

Baker’s editorial scoffed at government claims NAWIC had been excluded from the task force because the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs wanted Washington-based groups it could work with on a continuing basis. Baker expressed doubts the government office and its task force were in contact 40 hours a week and pointed out that modern communications and the accessibility of air travel overcome most distance problems that might impact task force activity.

Baker said the real reason for the exclusion of NAWIC was its opposition to the government’s increases in targeted numbers of women to be employed on construction jobs. “To exclude a group with as much knowledge as NAWIC has about our industry is to boast that you have consensus by dealing only with those who agree with you,” Baker noted. “That is far from being consensus. It’s quota-setting by prearrangement.”

Baker’s comments received acclaim from numerous NAWIC chapters. Some asked for permission to reprint the editorial, and most expressed a similar indignation at the government’s rebuff. Among the comments representative of NAWIC responses were:

• “We, too, are at a loss to understand the determined effort of the
Department of Labor’s OFCCP to exclude NAWIC from the Task Force and Monitoring Committees reviewing Goals and Timetables. NAWIC’s exclusion has been an extremely frustrating experience for the entire membership.” — Betty Kornegay, Executive Director, NAWIC.

• “I know all of NAWIC appreciates the recognition you have given our organization even though our government chose not to do so in the matter of setting goals for the employment of more women in construction.” — Patsy W. Cook, NAWIC member, Dallas, Texas.

• “The fact that the federal government has ignored common sense and reason in the imposition of goals for the hiring of women and minorities is deplorable. We, along with other leading construction associations, would have appreciated the opportunity to develop meaningful programs that would help women achieve realistic programs that would lead to careers in the nation’s largest industry.” — Vicki Mora, Secretary, Albuquerque Chapter 82.

• “Your article was excellent.” — Anita L. Burke, NAWIC member, Columbus, Ohio.

Baker agreed with NAWIC members who considered it “necessary” for the organization to continue to pursue every possible avenue for securing representation on these important decision-making bodies.

“I am not taking the stump for NAWIC. They can fight their own battles, and, from what we see in the construction press, they are doing just this. But I am at a considerable loss to understand—or appreciate—the apparently determined effort by the government to exclude one of the very few rational voices in this entire situation,” Baker said.

“We feel that NAWIC has a right—and the Department of Labor has an obligation—to add realism to the decision-making process, he concluded.