# CABINET

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National Action Network, said a Black attorney general is one of his requests given the effort by President Donald Trump and Attorney General Bill Barr to gut voting protections and Civil Rights. This has also been an explosive year for national protests against police shootings of Black people.

"We need him to have an Attorney General that will immediately restore those consent decrees and immediately deal with the Voting Rights Act," Sharpton said in a press briefing by the civil rights leaders following the meeting with Biden and Harris.

"You can't mourn John Lewis on one hand and not move to protect what he was fighting for and what he shed blood for on the Edmund Pettus Bridge."

An official with the Biden-Harris transition, speaking to The Hill, defended the team's push for diversity, noting that 46 percent of all campaign staff were people of color and 52 percent were women.

As well, Biden's team noted that he is still in the early stages of appointments, having only named fewer than a quarter of the federal positions he plans to highlight.

## 'Refreshing' comments

Both Biden and Harris told CNN's Jake Tapper in a televised interview that they are simply "not finished yet" as Biden repeated his promise to appoint an administration with record level diversity that "looks like America."

CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES/TNS

**Gen. Lloyd Austin III testifies before the U.S Senate Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill in 2005. President-elect Joe Biden has nominated the retired general as his defense secretary.**

After spending nearly two hours with Biden and Harris, the civil rights leaders said in a virtual press briefing that a new day is breaking in terms of African Americans being in the White House after four hard years of Donald Trump. But they are taking a wait and see attitude.

"Today the seven of us spent approximately one hour and 45 minutes with President-elect Biden, Vice-President-Elect Harris and Assistant to the President Cedric Richmond, discussing a range of very important issues relative to the transition of the future Biden administration and the challenges that this nation faces," said Marc Morial, president/CEO of the National Urban League, who led the briefing after the meeting.

"We talked extensively about the need for there to be a diverse cabinet, subcabinet and presidential appointments," Morial said. "The president-elect said that he intends to make history when it comes to the appointment of African Americans and Hispanics to his cabinet and his subcabinet…and while we will not judge the ultimate outcome, to me it was refreshing to hear."

## Other concerns

Also at the meeting were NAACP President Derrick Johnson; Sharpton; Sherrilyn Ifill president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Kristen Clarke, president and executive director of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law; Vanita Gupta, president of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights; and Melanie Campbell, president/CEO of the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation.

"There has been diversity with President-elect Biden's initial appointments but before Rep Marcia Fudge was appointed to Secretary of Housing and Urban Development today there had not been any woman of color appointed to a statuary cabinet post," said Campbell, also convenor of the Black Women's Roundtable.

Campbell added that one of her top concerns is how people of color are being treated in the COVID-19 pandemic.

"They need to look at the issue of implicit bias in terms of how they are screening people during the COVID-19 pandemic," Campbell said. "I shared my own story with President-elect Biden of being a COVID-19 survivor and how after sent home with Tylenol only to be back in the hospital the next day in ICU."

## Ongoing dialogue

Johnson said, "I am encouraged that this will be an ongoing dialogue and that racial equity will be a priority. We dedicated people who report directly to the president just like in cooperate America…It is important for our democracy to work for everyone and not just certain people."

Ifill said that she emphasized to the President-elect about having a "civil rights agenda that would focus on voting and policing and I also raised the issue of what is happening in our prisons today in terms of COVID. We need a strong Attorney General who has a demonstrated record of criminal justice reform as well as civil rights."

In terms of the federal bench, not just at the Supreme Court, "but to think that the reforms that are needed throughout the federal judicial system. I think the President-elect and the Vice President-elect clearly listened," Ifill added.

Clarke concluded, "Under the Trump administration Black people have been silenced, marginalized and ignored. This meeting was intended to make clear that racial justice must be at the center of the Biden-Harris administration's approach to confronting the profound problems that we face in the nation. This meeting was intended to ensure that Black people will be listened to and this administration will respect our dignity and humanity.

# COVID

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ground for COVID-19, with almost 20,000 Floridians dead of COVID-19 and approximately 1.1 million infected.

Miami-Dade County ranks No. 3 in the number of COVID-19 cases on a county level in America. Broward County is No. 8 nationally; Palm Beach County is No. 23; Hillsborough is No. 28; Orange County is No. 29.

The Sunshine State even shows up globally. Among all the world's states or provinces, Florida ranks No. 6 worldwide in the number of infections.

In fact, the state of Florida alone has more COVID-19 infections than the entire nations of Iran, Peru, or Turkey. Florida has more infections than the nations of Canada, Israel, and Austria combined.

## It's bad

If the state of Florida is in COVID-19 crisis mode – despite what seems to be a lack of seriousness in state leadership – where does that leave the state's 3.4 million Black residents?

Are African Americans beating the illness? Are Black families coping?

It's been statistically proven that Blacks generally have more underlying health problems and economic hardships than their White counterparts, and that both those factors negatively impact the health of Black people.

And there is a well-known saying in Black communities: "When White folks catch a cold, Black folks catch pneumonia." Still, data analyzing COVID-19's impact by race or ethnicity is incomplete.

## Risky to be Black

However, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there's enough data to conclude that being Black is a risk factor with regard to COVID-19. Compared to White, Non-Hispanic persons, Black Americans are 1.4 times more likely to get infected, 3.7 times more likely to be hospitalized once they are infected, and 2.8 times more likely to die from the infection.

How are Blacks handling this threat? How are Black communities across the state responding to this crisis?

Are Black churches and pastors doing all they can to help their congregants cope with something that sprung out of nowhere leaving us to face the unknown - on our own? Are politicians doing what's necessary to address the needs, concerns and fears of those impacted the most by this pandemic ?

## Doing enough?

While health care professionals are superbly treating those who come through the doors of emergency rooms around the state, is the medical community doing enough research and education to inform people of color about the risks and treatments as the daily numbers skyrocket?

What about education and school? Are Black families, especially those who may already be facing tough financial times, able to school their children in effective ways that also keep them safe?

What about Black businesses? How are they bearing the brunt of this economic downturn as a result of the COVID-19 crunch?

So many questions, all with complex answers as we all face a new world order, the likes of which no one has ever experienced.

## No time to waste

We do know that time is of the essence and every minute matters when it comes to the battle against this raging pandemic. And even though a vaccine is on the horizon, will Blacks be counted in the number?

Or perhaps a more poignant question: Do Blacks WANT to be counted in the number when the vaccine becomes readily available?

With well-proved (and well-founded) historical distrust of the medical profession, some African Americans may not want the vaccine – which many already believe was rushed into existence. Some African Americans are willing to be vaccinated, but they won't be at the front of the line despite being at higher risk for getting infected.

In order to make a dent in the spread of COVID-19, 75 percent to 80 percent of the total population of United States must be vaccinated, according to infectious disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci.

How does one expect to convince African Americans to take that chance despite their nervousness and fears?

## Nothing new

Dr. Kevin Sneed is senior associate vice president at the University of South Florida Health, as well as dean of Taneja College of Pharmacy at USF in Tampa. He says he has two prevailing thoughts that he wants the public to know as they ponder whether to take the vaccine.

**Dr. Kevin Sneed**

First, he points out that the vaccine technology utilized by Pfizer and Moderna, the two companies whose vaccines we will likely see first, is not new.

"There's a perception that we started working with this technology just this year. But the reality is the vaccine technology used by Moderna and Pfizer started in 2013 and 2014 with (then-President) Barack Obama," pointed out Sneed, who speaks regularly to groups of African Americans nationally and locally.

He said Obama was ahead of the curve on the vaccine technology and asserted that Obama predicted there would be another pandemic in four or five years and that the country needed to be prepared.

It turns out Obama was on point. We now know the first cases of coronavirus likely popped up in America in late 2019. We are facing a pandemic six years after his prediction.

## 'A chance to live'

Second, Sneed says his recommendation to those who are leery of the vaccine is to "take a chance to live." He stresses that out of 200,000 people who've participated in clinical trials, no one has died.

**Dr. Rose Stiffin**

Dr. Rose Stiffin, Associate Professor and Chair of Health and Natural Sciences at Florida Memorial University in Miami, says she knows Blacks have concerns about the COVID vaccines.

"Blacks are hesitant about taking the vaccine, because historically Blacks have not been treated well in the health care field," Stiffin acknowledged.

"You are not being injected with the (actual) virus," she stated in a telephone interview from Miami. Still, she was cautious.

"Even though the vaccines have 95 percent efficacy, we still have a long way to go," she noted.

## Real life

Stiffin says research is key. Her students are tasked with researching and writing about COVID-19 as well, and it's about more than a classroom lesson. It's about real life.

"It's not just that you have to pass my class. It's to teach them that science is real," she explained.

Stiffin says of five Black Americans is impacted by COVID-19 and she says there's an uptick in the virus because the general public should be wearing masks, social distancing and washing their hands. "The reason there's an uptick is we weren't doing these things."

## Hardest hit

Florida State Senator Bobby Powell says there's reason to be concerned in Florida.

**State Sen. Bobby Powell**

"Black communities are being hit the hardest. We have more underlying conditions and many are afraid to go to the doctor. Cases are continuing to increase in our state and Blacks continue to be impacted disproportionately," he indicated.

But he points out that an often-hidden fact is the alarming number of inmates in Florida's state prisons who are impacted by COVID. "The state doesn't talk about that," Powell declared.

In the coming weeks, this newspaper will examine how COVID-19 affects Black Floridians across the state.

JACOB KING/POOL/GETTY IMAGES/TNS

**William "Bill" Shakespeare, 81, receives the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at the University Hospital on Dec. 8 in Coventry, England. It was the start of the United Kingdom's immunization program.**

# PLAN

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been politicized, unfortunately … and that's going to be something that people are going to have to deal with," DeSantis said.

The Florida governor, a close ally of President Donald Trump, criticized what he labeled as "unscientific" shutdowns and said he hoped there would be evidence-based science that people could support.

"I hope we can get on the same page here (and) take politics out of it," he said.

DeSantis was the only governor on the panel who didn't directly address how the state would distribute vaccines to medically underserved and minority populations.

Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott, Tennessee Republican Gov. Bill Lee and Louisiana Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards answered the question. The governors were invited to speak on the panel because their vaccination distribution plans were considered some of the best in the nation.

## Approval expected

Meanwhile, Florida was required to submit a final copy of its COVID-19 distribution plan to the federal government by Dec. 4. The News Service of Florida's requests for the document have gone unanswered.

The Food and Drug Administration is expected to approve Pfizer Inc.'s request for emergency use authorization of its vaccine candidate this week after the FDA's meeting with a scientific advisory council.

At Tuesday's summit – meant to highlight the success of the Trump's administration's Operation Warp Speed program – officials said vaccines would ship within 24 hours of approval.

A second vaccine candidate by Moderna is expected to also receive approval this month, and the FDA meets with its advisory council for that vaccine Dec. 17.

Both of the vaccines require two doses to be effective.

## Selected facilities

Long-term care residents and staff members will receive free vaccinations under agreements the federal government reached with CVS and Walgreens. The pharmacies will provide vaccinations to residents and long-term care staff at facilities that signed up for the program.

Separately, the federal government will ship vaccines to five Florida hospitals: Jackson Memorial in Miami, AdventHealth in Orlando, Tampa General Hospital, the Memorial Healthcare System in Broward County and UF Health Jacksonville. Safety Net Hospital Alliance of Florida Chief Executive Officer Justin Senior said the hospitals are preparing for the vaccines, but the facilities did not know how many doses would be delivered.

DeSantis said the state plans on directing another vaccine being worked on by Johnson & Johnson to teachers and law enforcement. Johnson & Johnson said it hopes to have approval of its vaccine candidate in February.