



REIMAGINING US–AFRICA RELATIONS

*From Tope Fajingbesi**

It's January 20, 2023, we are on a beautiful farm situated a couple of miles south of the River Niger. Everyone on the field is sweating, but no one is complaining—not the small crowd of young farmers who are used to the heat, or their guest who just feels lucky to be missing the snowstorm hitting his hometown. But it isn't just the summer-like weather that's distracting this crowd from the harsh whispers of the sun. For him, this unique opportunity to answer the persistent call of the ancestors he never met, is beyond a dream come true. For them, the mere fact that America finally sent “one of their own,” is icing on a cake. Everyone is happy to see Adebowale (meaning the king has come back home).

Adebowale represents a redefined US–Africa relationship, which places agriculture and Black Americans front and center. It would enlist the help of experts such as Sedrick Rowe, who established an organic farm on the grounds of a historically Black school in Georgia, and who, in between planting and harvesting, is pursuing a PhD in soil health, researching ways to retain nutrients, cut down on pesticides, sequester more carbon in the soil,¹ and consequently aid African development. Like FDR, President Biden inherited an economy in shambles. He also inherited a country forced to confront the dark stain of racism, a pandemic, and an international landscape where the erosion of America's long-standing leadership gave China room to lock African nations into “multi-generational servitude.” Tackling these challenges will most certainly require innovative thinking and bold sacrifices. “However, I hope that, like FDR, to help lead the world out of this crisis, President Biden looks to a sector that has a track record of delivering—agriculture.”

“Beware of the naked man who offers you clothes”—we must first tackle the inequities in our own system. Decades of racial violence and unfair lending and land ownership policies have reduced the number of farms run by African Americans from 14% of the total in 1920 to less than 2% today.² The USDA could begin this journey via three means: USDA could leverage existing relationships with the Department of Education to create incentive programs that reward Black youths who pursue a degree in agriculture or undertake study abroad that focuses on agriculture. Second, USDA could work with Land Grant Institutions to implement international peer-mentoring and knowledge-exchange programs. And, lastly, USDA could collaborate with the State Department and USAID to replicate programs like the Fullbright Teaching Excellence program with specific focus on agriculture.

While the challenges facing African farmers may seem overwhelming, I truly believe that we can lend a hand to tackle life-changing issues such as produce-storage options for off-grid farmers, renewable energy, capacity building, and improved agricultural practices. Not only would we help African nations achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, but we would help millions of young Africans (many of whom are food poor because of poverty), reduce “desperation-induced” dangerous migration practices, and help farmers command higher (and fairer) prices. Ultimately, we would help Africa, the United States, and the world build back better.

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/31/climate/black-farmers-discrimination-agriculture.html?partner=bloomberg>

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WE CAN DO BETTER WITH COVID-19 VACCINATION IN DMV
From Karen Pataky, Chair, Public Policy & Political Action
Committee, and Chair, Health Policy Task Force

Our most vulnerable fellow Americans, mostly Black and Latinx are being locked out of COVID vaccination programs. The American health care structure is urban, hospital-centric, and high-tech driven. It is an apartheid-like system that primarily serves affluent communities with access to hospitals, and who are conversant with sophisticated websites to make a vaccination appointment. The more affluent also have more flexible working and child care hours.

So how do we proceed? For example: Eldercare and convalescent centers have two high-risk populations: patients and their caregivers and housekeeping staff. The centers are often located in suburban or rural areas, where caregivers are more likely to have grown up in non-English speaking families and to be nonwhite and unlicensed.

Not only do we make it difficult to get to a vaccination site, but there is a great degree of skepticism as to the safety and efficacy of vaccines in general, plus nonwhite Americans have valid, historic reasons to be suspicious.

So, what do we do? First, WE GO TO THEM. We go to their worksites, such as nursing homes. Yes, it will increase personnel costs, but COVID hospitalizations are much more costly. We provide printed information in a variety of appropriate languages. Health care personnel must discuss the vaccine with each individual, and treat every question with respect. We immediately vaccinate each worker and each patient who agrees. Then, we return in 2 or 3 weeks for the follow-up injection. The only way to vaccinate vulnerable populations is to go to them. We must invest the time and effort to go where they are and to speak a language that is appropriate and respectful. Saving lives is worth whatever it takes.

ANOTHER GOOD BIDEN CAMPAIGN PROMISE: A DEMOCRACY SUMMIT
From Elizabeth Clark, Chair, Human Rights & Democracy Task Force

The New York Times carried a report on February 1 on President Biden's commitment to hold a global Democracy Summit during his first year in office, a plan of which he outlined in depth in a spring 2020 *Foreign Affairs Journal* article.

According to Biden, "like-minded leaders" will discuss ways to strengthen their countries against corruption, election security, disinformation, and "the authoritarian model that has gripped China and Russia and seeped into nations like Turkey and Brazil." Among his specific plans Biden will fight for a constitutional amendment to completely eliminate private dollars from federal elections. He promises to issue a presidential policy directive that establishes combating corruption as a core national security interest.

Perhaps most inspiringly for a member of the WNDC, his Global Democracy Summit will include civil society organizations, which Biden says are "on the front lines in defense of democracy."

TRUMP ACQUITTAL: REPUBLICAN PARTY COLLAPSE
From Elizabeth Clark

We have had a shocking failure to convict a president willing, on clear evidence, to have his vice president killed to stop the 2020 election certification as part of a campaign to ram through a violent authoritarian coup. Those who voted not to convict him did not vote to protect the Constitution, the document they pledged to defend when they took office.

To shock implies to surprise. But, we cannot be shocked to hear that Trump plans to continue to lead his "Make America Great Again." Do we understand what his goal is? Do we understand what is going on?

We don't know what happens to the Republican Party now. Voices are all over the landscape. Will traditional Republicans break away to form a new third party? Will they turn themselves into a separate "faction." Accept being under an umbrella Party with Trump supporters?

It is hard to see how the radical Trump Republican Party is either going to disappear or get more moderate. There are many bad scenarios where Trump keeps his base, where he raises money for his political PAC whether or not he runs, and where the appeal to the base does not get more centrist. Instead of interest in bringing back the traditional Republicans, he moves in favor of urban militias, keeping ideology of stolen elections and "socialist" Democrats. The fact that the violent Trump party will not be able to build up enough votes to win a free and fair election will drive anti-democratic movements in the state.

Trump has said he is coming back. A serious 9/11-style Commission must be set up soon to look into the causes of the January 6 insurrection. The 14th Amendment must be invoked to preclude his running in 2024.



GVP TASK FORCE REPORT

From Ellen McGovern, Chair, Gun Violence Prevention Task Force

New Administration

Giffords Executive Director Peter Ambler, following a recent meeting of major gun safety advocates with the White House, said, "President Biden is committed to taking executive action and working with Congress to put in place reforms that will keep this country's kids and communities safe." On February 14, the third anniversary of the Parkland mass shooting, President Biden asked Congress to move quickly on "common sense" gun reform legislation before we have another massacre.

- Watch the US House for potential action on HR 8, Background Checks legislation.
- Read the WNDC letter from Gun Violence Survivors to President Biden at democraticwoman.org/national-gun-violence-survivors-letter-to-president-biden

TikTok and Guns

This shouldn't be shocking, but it is! *Media Matters* recently reported that TikTok includes lots of firearm content on its site. Instructional videos teach users how to modify assault weapons to make them automatic. They also include far-right militia content. Further, *Media Matters* indicates that a third of TikTok users may be aged 14 or under. TikTok community guidelines regarding firearms are vague, and enforcement is almost nonexistent. It is time for them to consider the safety of their community!

The Region

Virginia

The VA General Assembly completed its regular session February 8. Governor Northam then started a Special Session to finish up the General Assembly's work for 2021.

Emma Rowland, new WNDC member and new GVP Task Force member, is following Virginia state legislative activities for us. She reports that HB 2128, increasing the number of days for Virginia's state police to complete background checks on gun purchasers from 3 to 5 passed, as well as a bill (HB 2276) banning "ghost guns" throughout the state.

SB 1382, the bill that would have prohibited domestic abusers convicted of misdemeanor crimes of assault and battery did not pass the Senate. However, the House version of the bill (HB 1992) gives senators a second chance to review, reconsider, and vote on it again, according to the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence.

The Senate Rules Committee passed bill (HB 2295), which prohibits carrying guns within the Capitol Square and surrounding areas and state-owned buildings. A similar bill (SB 1381) that prohibits people from carrying weapons in state-owned or -leased buildings was referred to the Special Session. Virginia WNDC members: monitor the Senate action, as this bill could be sent to the floor for a vote by the time you receive the March Newsletter/PD.

Maryland

The MD General Assembly is taking up “ghost guns” legislation (SB 624/HB 638). A senate hearing is scheduled for March 1 in the Judicial Proceeding Committee. Maryland WNDC members: monitor this!

No Knock Warrants Elimination (HB 188) is still in committee. Both the Senate and House voted to override the governor’s veto of SB 208 and HB 4 (background checks on all sales of long guns). Bravo!

District of Columbia

GVP Task Force member and DC liaison, Marcie Cohen, reports:

- Ward 8 councilmember Trayon White is requesting that the District declare a state of emergency to combat gun violence. Last year was the most violent year in DC in the past 15 years, and so far, this year is surpassing it.
- The City Council has voted to allocate funds from the Metropolitan Police Department to agencies and prevention programs. The budget provides \$125 million to the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement and \$3.65 million to programs like Messengers.
- Mayor Bowser named Linda Harlee Harper DC Director of Gun Violence, a newly created
- position. Read the WNDC Letter to Mayor Bowser at democraticwoman.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Feb.-2021-Letter-Urging-Prioritization-of-Gun-Violence-Prevention.pdf

Next Meeting: 5:00 pm, Tuesday, March 23.

We welcome new task force members any time!

Note: All of the above articles are the opinions of the author alone and do not represent any position of the WNDC.

