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OP-ED

GOVERNOR GRETCHEN WHITMER: STAY THE COURSE. DON'T GIVE-UP YOUR POWER!

Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony, President, Detroit Branch NAACP

DETROIT – As a citizen of the state of Michigan, I am proud of our Governor for sticking to her convictions in the face of unrelenting political pressure from the White House to the state house of Michigan. She has continued to let evidence and facts guide her decisions as it relates to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. Michigan is a national leader in addressing the racial disparities of COVID-19 and as a result has saved thousands of valuable lives throughout all our communities. The state's response to this virus has been effective to every Michigan community but in particular every community of color. The Governor has integrated executive orders and specific initiatives to address the disparities inside African American and poor white communities who have been impacted as a result of this deadly virus. Is there still more to do? Absolutely. Have we crossed the river towards the other side of ending this nightmare? No, we have not. However, now is not the time to take away the power that has been entrusted to every Michigan Governor for the past 75 years. The worst thing that can be done now is to undermine the Governor's proven ability to save lives and reopen our economy safely by stripping away her emergency powers. We cannot afford to go backwards.

This virus has exposed deep racial disparities existing in our health care system and society as a whole for generations. From maternal mortality rates being twice as high for African American women compared to white women, to African American newborns being three times more likely than white babies to die, when cared for by white doctors. We as a society have been forced to deal with historic biases that have impacted the outcome of generations of Michiganders. In response to the pandemic and its disparate impacts on vulnerable communities, Governor Whitmer recognized that working to address historic racial health disparities and the threat of implicit bias was critical to reversing the trajectory of the coronavirus. She created the COVID-19 Taskforce On Racial Disparities, led by Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist II. This taskforce made recommendations on how to better protect African American communities from the virus. This is one of the first such taskforces created in the nation. She also increased and sped up COVID-19 testing in communities of color around the state.

Unlike the states of Florida, Georgia, and Missouri, where governors have opened up the state and not stressed the importance of wearing facial masks, hand washing, and physical distancing, our Governor has stood strong. The results are clear. The number of COVID-19 cases are down and the number of deaths in the community have been reduced. This is vitally important as spikes in COVID-19 cases in certain areas are now occurring. For those who want to disrupt this direction, shame on you. This is no more than a mean-spirited power grab designed by some in our legislative body to take away our governors' ability to do her job. Our Governor consults with the experts in medical science. She does not rely on the politicians, who do not even believe in science. As we are now moving towards the flu season, we are facing a precarious threat of yet another dangerous second wave. The Governor, our front-line workers, children and parents need every tool possible at their disposal to continue to remain safe and secure. We as Michiganders must keep our hopes and our focus on the promises of a brighter future, rather than the heartaches of a gloomy past. Therefore, let us encourage the Governor to keep the faith, run this race, and stay the course. In so doing, she will honor the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who reminds us, *"of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."*

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