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# Opinion

## Black Women are Changing the Tide of American Politics

Last week, the world witnessed something that had never been done before in the history of politics in the United States.

Not only did Democratic voters in Georgia elect a 44-year-old African American candidate as the first-ever Black gubernatorial nominee in the state, they also made history by electing the first Black woman to be a major party nominee for governor in the United States.

That's right — former Georgia House Minority Leader and attorney Stacey Abrams soundly defeated her opponent, former State Rep. Stacey Evans, with an overwhelming 53 percent landslide victory; Abrams won 76.5 percent of the vote compared to Evans' 23.5 percent. Abrams will face off against the winner of the Republican primary runoff election that will be held in July between Georgia's Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle and Secretary of State Brian Kemp.

While much of the political conversation around the country has been focused on the success of women candidates as a whole, one of the primary reasons for Abrams' dominant showing in the Democratic primary was the high turnout of Black voters, particularly Black women

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Columnist

voters.

The convincing victory by Abrams, a rising star in the Democratic Party, has created a significant amount of chatter in political circles about the growing success Black women candidates are having across the country, particularly in a deeply southern

**“We have to reach out to those who do not believe their voices matter**

state like Georgia that hasn't had a Democratic governor since 2003.

“I am a proud daughter of the Deep South,” Abrams stated during her victory speech after winning the Georgia Democratic gubernatorial nomination. “To claim our victory, to write that next chapter and live those best lives, we have a lot of work to do. We have to reach out to

those who do not believe their voices matter. Who have been disappointed again and again by promises made and never kept...With your help, we will register every last person we know.”

Abrams continued: “And we're going to search out those we don't know yet and prove they matter to us, too... In the Book of Esther, there's a verse that reminds us that we were born for such a time as this. And now is a time to defend our values and protect the vulnerable — to stand in the gap and to lead the way... that is what we will continue to do — all the way to victory in November.”

A victory by Abrams in November would truly be a game changer relative to politics, as we know it, in the Deep South and across the country.

Prior to 2003, no Republican had ever served as governor in Georgia since Reconstruction. Republican George “Sonny” Perdue III changed that after he was elected and then sworn in on January 13, 2003. Perdue served until 2011, and the governorship in Georgia has remained in Republican control ever since.

Then, if you take a look at the rest of the Deep South, which consists of states like Texas, Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi, Arkansas and

Louisiana, each of those states currently has a Republican governor at the helm, with the exception of Louisiana, where former Democratic state legislator John Bel Edwards was sworn in as governor in 2016.

Abrams has a chance to change the overall landscape of politics as we know it, but it will take more than having her name on the ballot as the Democratic nominee in Georgia to make that a reality — it will require engaging existing Black voters and focusing on getting newly registered Black voters to the polls in November.

Abrams has adopted a strategy focused on registering new Black voters and engaging more Blacks to come out to the polls and vote in November 2018 than came out in 2014, when only 40 percent of African Americans went to the polls in Georgia, compared to roughly 48 percent of Whites.

If recent history is any indication, the only way the tides will turn in the favorable direction Democrats hope for relative to the key gubernatorial seats that are up for grabs in battleground states this November, is if there is a heavy Black voter turnout.

Read the rest of this commentary at  
**TheSkanner.com**

## Blacks Can't Afford to Ignore Dental Health

While Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide a safety net, access to dental care is a big issue, especially for children of color. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, “tooth decay is the most common chronic disease among children in the United States, five times as prevalent as asthma, and dental care is one of the nation's greatest unmet children's health needs.” Why? Sometimes children's parents simply did not arrange for them to see a dentist. Sometimes, dental services were not available in particular areas, for example, dental needs are sometimes more likely to be addressed in emergency rooms than dental clinics. And, a 2016 report from the Department of Health and Human Services said that dental provider shortages were at least part of the reason some children, especially low-income Black and Hispanic children, lack dental care.

Children pay a big price when their dental needs are unmet. In the worst and most extreme cases, as in that of Maryland's Deamonte Driver, children can die, because they do not have access to basic dental services.

“Childhood dental decay can

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MalveauxNNPA  
Columnist

lead to pain, difficulty eating, speaking and sleeping, and more serious infections, some of which can be life-threatening,” said Dr. Diane Earle, the managing dental director for Kool Smiles.

**“Children pay a big price when their dental needs are unmet**

To address some of the need, Kool Smiles is offering free dental care to children in need on Sunday, May 20. Forty-nine offices in 13 states plus Washington, D.C. will be open to provide dental exams, extractions, fillings, sealants, and other emergency services. The free day is open to children who either lack insurance or are underinsured.

To be sure, Kool Smiles can't possibly provide a smile for every child, but they are taking a step in the right direction. This year represents

the fourth year that the organization has offered the free service. It's first-come, first-serve; so if you are interested, check out mykoolsmiles.com/sharing smiles, where you can register for a free appointment. In the past three years more than 1,400 children have received free dental care, with more than 500 being treated last year. Kool Smiles hopes to serve even more children this year.

Access to safe and affordable health care has been part of my portfolio for some years.

In 2015, I had the privilege of spending a week at Meharry Medical College, lecturing on health policy. The challenges that people of color face around health care can be distilled to the 3 A's: Access, Assets, and Attitudes.

All too often access is limited, because people live in the wrong areas, because providers are unavailable, or because there are other reasons people can't physically get to the care they need. Assets determine almost everything—if you don't have the dollars, no matter what the proximity, you won't likely have the care you need.

Finally, the attitudes of both providers and patients make a difference in who seeks care and in what kind of care is

provided.

Recent work on maternal mortality among African American women, regardless of race, suggests that racial attitudes in treatment make a difference. Consider the case of our superstar, Serena Williams, who almost died giving birth to her precious Alexis Olympia, partly, because of some preconceived notions about Black folks on the part of misguided medical professionals.

Mental health and dental health are the two parts of healthcare that are most frequently ignored. It is not enough to simply get an annual checkup.

Increasing research shows that mental health and physical health are inextricably intertwined. Dental health, all too frequently, is ignored. Even those with “good” health insurance may have limited dental insurance. And lower-income folks rely on Medicaid and CHIP, but may not have anywhere to go to get the help they need.

Dental practitioners like Dr. Diane Earle, a second-generation Meharry-trained dentist, stand in the gap for those who may not have access to healthcare.

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