

BY LOUIS C. WARD

“We must change our approach to rebuild, rebrand, and reestablish the culture of this organization to make sure we garner the respect we deserve,” stated President Elect Mallory, who seemed very aware of what the immediate objectives of the political organization should be.



President Mallory understands the power that the DBCF can wield when it's organized and the executive committee is partnering and consistently communicating

with other organizations to create one powerful force. “By improving the relationship with our leadership in the legislative and Congressional Black Caucus we can strengthen our

“We will also listen to and strengthen engagement with the state and local Black caucus chapters to be sure all members are informed, celebrated and supported,” concluded President Mallory, depicting a keen sense of understanding the significance of having local community input. This WILL NOT be a dictatorship, this is “OUR-SHIP” stated Mallory. He will pull in and brainstorm with the local chapters to make DBCF a viable, powerful and very respected Black Democratic entity in the

A full-body photograph of Val Demings standing outdoors. She is positioned in the center-right of the frame, wearing a dark blue blazer over a white top and a gold necklace. She is gesturing with her hands as if speaking. To her left is a large, thick tree trunk. In the background, there is a white house with a blue door and a small porch, surrounded by green grass and trees. The text "VAL DEMINGS" is overlaid in white capital letters at the bottom left of the image.

“When you grow up in the

South poor, Black and female, you have to have faith in progress and opportunity. My father was a janitor and my mother was a maid -- she said: 'never tire of doing good, never tire,' said Val Demings. "I've never tired of representing Florida,

Long before she would become Orlando's first female Chief of

She took her first job at 14 as a dishwasher. Worked hard in school. Became the first in her family to go to college, working at a fast food restaurant to pay her way. She became a social worker, working to protect children in broken homes. Then, dismayed at a system that was



"Voting is the basic building block of our prized democracy. During our state convention, the League demonstrated how democracy should work when our grassroots members voted for new leadership. In doing this, League members repudiated times in the 1920s and later in the 1960s when white League members were not as welcoming to Black women."

A group of people, including men and women, are standing in a line behind white metal barriers. They are all wearing face masks. In the background, there are red umbrellas and a fence.

Experts say the 90-day review ordered on May 26 by President Joe Biden will push American intelligence agencies to collect more information and review what they already have. Former State Department officials

Many scientists, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, say they still believe the virus most likely occurred in nature and jumped from animals to humans. Virus researchers have



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DEM BLACK CAUCUS FROM PAGE A1

sunshine state.

Many DBCF members seemed very excited about the new executive team, which included Jordan Pride, 1st Vice President; Easton Harrison, 2nd Vice President; Annie Gumren Sweeting, Secretary; and Jill Lewis Daggs, Treasurer

The newly elected executive team has two members under 30 years old, who are active in the DBCF and other organizations. Their work with young people could help increase the organization’s young adults membership and may provide the opportunity for DBCF to better understand the issues and needs of that demographic.

Annie Gumren Sweeting, DBCF

new secretary, brings a wealth of clerical experience after serving in administrative capacities with the U.S. Armed Forces. She is compassionate, energetic and “fired up and ready to go”

President Mallory and Jill L Daggs bring experience from being past presidents of their respective Democratic Black Caucus Chapters and being members of the DBCF Executive Committee for the past four years. They are very active with their local Democratic Executive Committees (DEC), the NAACP, and various other organizations working to change and publicize the racist policies that are constantly working to suppress the vote, and

pass laws that are not in the best interest of Black people or the Florida electorate.

The Florida Democratic Party cannot overstate the reality that it’s imperative that the 2022 midterm election be a major part of DBCF’s focus for change in the state. The Executive Committee’s plans to increase chapters in more counties, elect more Democrats in the state, defeat Governor Ron DeSantis and Marco Rubio, and knock back voter suppression laws and policies that help promote Governor DeSantis, a possible Republican candidate for the presidency in 2024. Will strike a major blow to a partisan legislative body in Florida.

More than 250 DBCF members, representing 25 counties, voted in

the first time Zoom election. Despite some minor glitches prolonging the Zoom election, it was done effectively and transparently, and all qualified members were able to vote.

I believe President Mallory has the vision, the compassion, the energy and the team to make DBCF an influential and powerful political dynamic for all people in Florida, stated a former DBCF Executive Committee chair. “I encourage all DBCF members to get on board and be about the business of taking Florida back by winning the seats for U.S. Senate, Governor, Congress in 2022.”

Jill Daggs said, “Let’s take the past and with a new vision make a phenomenal future.”

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leaving too many families behind, she signed up to become a police officer — an officer with a social worker’s heart.

It was a tough path, and tougher still in the 80s for a woman and Black American in a profession that had few of either. But no obstacle had ever deterred the daughter of James and Elouise. She graduated from the police academy with citations for excellence, and quickly earned a reputation as a bold, creative cop willing to take on conventional thinking and the toughest parts of the city.

Chief Demings served 27 years and at every rank level in the department. She commanded the Special Operations division and handled the department’s highest-profile tasks. She coordinated the response of the Airport Division on 9/11. And in 2007, she made history when she was appointed to serve as the city’s first female Chief of Police.

The eyes of the city were on her. The financial crisis was squeezing budgets. But by taking the tough fights head-on, she did more with less, kept officers on the street, and crushed

violent crime, reducing it by 40%.

In 2016, Chief Demings was elected by the voters of Florida’s 10th District to serve in Congress. She swiftly gained a reputation as a tireless champion for public safety, civil rights, and the American Dream that had given her a chance to succeed. She gained widespread acclaim for her conduct as a deliberative and justice-focused impeachment manager during the impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump.

Rep. Val Demings and her husband

Jerry Demings (currently serving as Mayor of Orange County) have been blessed with three children and five grandchildren. When she’s not serving her constituents and spending time with her family, she rides her Harley-Davidson Road King Classic.

CECILE SCOON, ESQ. PAGE A1

said President Scoon. “My election was a rejection of that troubling past and an embracement of diversity, equity and inclusivity. I love the League because it is primarily a group of powerful women standing up for the rights of all. I look forward to this journey as we work to meet the many challenges of our time.”

Scoon has been recognized nationally for her work surrounding Florida’s 2018 Amendment 4 as

well as for her continued advocacy for fair enfranchisement for all. In January of 2021, the Florida Bar Association awarded Scoon with a President’s Pro-Bono award. Scoon, no stranger to historic firsts, was recognized in early 2021 as the first Black woman to practice law privately in Bay County, FL.

Scoon succeeds former Florida League President Patricia Brigham who served as the

organization’s President since 2018. The remainder of officers voted in include Marisol Zenteno (1st Vice President) of Miami, Shawn Bartelt (2nd Vice President) of Sarasota, Patricia Drago (Secretary) of Daytona Beach and Mark Songer (Treasurer) of Key West. Elected directors include Jennifer Adams of Winter Park, Jonathan Hackley of Riviera Beach, Danielle Irwin of Tallahassee, Dr. Julie Kessel of St. Petersburg and Maegen Pierce of Orlando.

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not publicly identified any key new scientific evidence that might make the lab-leak hypothesis more likely.

Virologists also say it is unlikely that any definitive answer about virus origins will be possible in 90 days. The work to fully confirm origins and pathways of past viruses — such as the first SARS or HIV/ AIDS — has taken years or decades.

A look at what is known about the U.S. investigation of the virus.

WHAT ARE INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES REVIEWING?

Biden ordered a review of what the White House said was an initial finding leading to “two likely scenarios,” an animal-to-human transmission or a lab leak. The White House statement says two agencies in the 18-member intelligence community lean toward the hypothesis of a transmission in nature; another agency leans toward a lab leak.

One document drawing new attention is a State Department fact sheet published in the last days of Trump’s administration. The memo notes that the U.S. believes three researchers at a Wuhan, China, lab sought medical treatment for a respiratory illness in November 2019. However, the report is not conclusive: The origin and severity of the staffers’ illness is not known — and most people in China regularly go to hospitals, not primary-care physicians, for routine care.

The memo also pointed to “gain of function” studies — which in theory could enhance the lethality or transmissibility of a virus — allegedly done at the Wuhan lab with U.S. backing. However, National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins has since adamantly denied that the U.S. supported any “gain-of-function” research on coronaviruses in Wuhan.

David Feith, who served as deputy assistant secretary of state

for East Asian and Pacific Affairs under Trump, said he supported Biden’s call for an enhanced review. “Implicit in the president’s statement is that there is more to analyze and more to collect than has been analyzed or collected to date,” Feith said.

The Director of National Intelligence declined to comment.

IS CHINA HAMPERING INVESTIGATIONS?

The White House statement criticized China for a lack of transparency, echoing previous criticisms by Democrats and Republicans. “The failure to get our inspectors on the ground in those early months will always hamper any investigation into the origin of COVID-19,” the White House said.

The Associated Press has reported on China’s interference in the World Health Organization’s probes of the virus and its fanning of conspiracy theories online. China has also forced journalists to leave the country in recent years and silenced or jailed whistleblowers from Wuhan and elsewhere.

The lack of transparency in China is a significant and familiar challenge. But that does not in itself signal that something in particular is being hidden.

“The problem is when you make that announcement (Biden’s call for investigation) in a highly politicized environment, it makes it even less likely that China will cooperate with efforts to find the origins of the virus,” said Yanzhong Huang, a senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations.

WHAT DO SCIENTISTS BELIEVE ABOUT VIRUS ORIGINS?

The most compelling argument for investigating the possibility of a lab leak is not any new hard evidence, but rather the fact that another pathway for virus spread

has not been 100% confirmed.

“The great probability is still that this virus came from a wildlife reservoir,” said Arinjay Banerjee, a virologist at the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization in Saskatchewan, Canada. He pointed to the fact that spillover events — when viruses jump from animals to humans — are common in nature, and that scientists already know of two similar beta coronaviruses that evolved in bats and caused epidemics when humans were infected, SARS1 and MERS.

However, the case is not completely closed. “There are probabilities, and there are possibilities,” said Banerjee. “Because nobody has identified a virus that’s 100% identical to SARS-CoV-2 in any animal, there is still room for researchers to ask about other possibilities.”

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO CONFIRM THE ORIGIN OF A VIRUS?

Confirming with 100% certainty the origin of a virus is often not fast, easy, or always even possible.

For example, scientists never confirmed the origin of smallpox before the disease was eradicated through a global vaccination program.

In the case of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) — a disease caused by a beta coronavirus, like the current coronavirus — researchers first identified the virus in February 2003. Later that year, scientists discovered the likely intermediary hosts: Himalayan palm civets found at live-animal markets in Guangdong, China. But it wasn’t until 2017 that researchers traced the likely original source of the virus to bat caves in China’s Yunnan province.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO UNDERSTAND THE ORIGIN?

From a scientific perspective, researchers are always keen to better understand how diseases evolve.

From a public health perspective, if a virus has transitioned to being spread mostly by human-to-human contact, discovering its origins is not as essential to strategies for containing the disease.

“Questions of origins and questions of disease control are not the same thing once human-to-human transmission has become common,” said Deborah Seligsohn, an expert in environment and public health at Villanova University.

Republicans have pressed for more inquiries into a possible lab leak as part of a broader effort to blame China and vindicate Trump’s handling of the pandemic. Nearly 600,000 people in the United States have died of COVID-19, the highest toll of any country.

WHAY HAPPENS AFTER THE 90 DAYS?

Many scientists caution that it’s unlikely a 90-day investigation will yield definitive new answers.

“We rarely get a ‘smoking gun,’” said Stephen Morse, a disease researcher at Columbia University. “Even under the best of circumstances we rarely get certainty, just degrees of likelihood.”

Any findings will likely be politically explosive, especially if new evidence comes to light supporting or dismissing the zoonotic transfer or lab-leak theory. And a failure to reach definitive conclusions, almost inevitable after a 90-day review, could provide grist for Trump supporters and opponents alike, as well as embolden conspiracy theorists.

Meanwhile experts like the Council on Foreign Relations’ Huang suspect China may simply clamp down more, adding another complication to already tense relations. “This will likely make it even more challenging to extract concessions from China to allow another team to visit Wuhan, or have unfettered access to investigate there,” he said.