



The School for Ethics and Global Leadership

Speechwriting Case Study

ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

n.b. This is a hypothetical exercise. Some facts, events, and characters are real. Others are not.

It is late October, 2020. The all-important Presidential election is next Tuesday. The release of Donald Trump's tax returns late last month only hardened deeply partisan sentiments across the country: the polls did not budge. In fact, polls now show the race is tightening, with Joe Biden and Kamala Harris' lead consistent but inside the margin of error.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic death toll has topped 300,000 and flu season is accelerating. Even the most conservative governors are openly acknowledging the power of a vaccine to reverse the pandemic's catastrophic course.

This week the American public received a bit of important news: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has just approved the first COVID-19 vaccine and the first doses are now ready for the general public. Fridie Pharmaceuticals, the vaccine's manufacturer, is a promising new company with gifted scientists but little track record.

The Trump Administration's vaccine approval process, dubbed "Operation Warp Speed," has caused controversy, skepticism, and excitement. In response to concerns that political influence would produce an unsafe vaccine, all the major pharmaceutical companies (including Fridie) signed a pledge to follow established safety and scientific protocols. Nevertheless, these drug companies have cut corners. For example, they have all failed to test vaccines adequately in marginalized populations, where COVID-19's impact is most severe. This clearly violates FDA guidelines, but in the rush to produce a vaccine, the government appears to be looking the other way. Other drug companies have been silent when asked to comment on the Fridie vaccine; it's clear they want their own approval processes to move quickly and that they believe their vaccines will be superior.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has previously said that it can take years to prove a vaccine's safety and efficacy. Yet at the White House press conference announcing the FDA's approval, he came close to expressing full confidence in Fridie, calling the new vaccine "as safe as safe can be." At the same news conference, President Trump declared "absolute and total victory" over the disease and urged Americans to take the vaccine. "You'd have to be an idiot, or a Democrat, not to," Trump laughed.

American public opinion about the vaccine is mixed: only 45% of Americans say they will take the vaccine as soon as it becomes available. Skepticism is particularly high among the population the disease has hit hardest: African Americans and Latino/as. In Washington, DC, for example, African Americans are more than twice as likely as Whites to contract COVID-19, (despite studies showing they are more likely to wear masks), and over seven times more likely to die. Nationwide, Latino/as are four times more likely to be hospitalized due to COVID-19. Yet surveys show only one-third of African Americans and 40% of Latino/as plan to take the vaccine. This is in part because of the long history of scientists taking advantage of African American and Latinx people—most notoriously the

“Tuskegee Syphilis Study,” and “Guatemala Syphilis Experiments,” as well as the racist eugenics movement—and in part because of African American and Latinx mistrust of President Trump.

Although the vaccine is now ready, there is a catch: there are only enough doses for a small fraction of the American population.

The Trump and Biden Campaigns

The Trump Administration and campaign need to convince the American public that the vaccine's approval is a huge win for America. Perhaps to counter allegations that the President is racist, the Administration is distributing early vaccine doses to communities of color in highly-affected urban areas. The Administration is also prioritizing nursing homes and essential workers. President Trump needs the support of agencies, like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), that he has previously maligned and attempted to influence. Many of these agencies now lack credibility: Republicans believe they are part of the "deep state" and Democrats think they are overrun by unscientific Trump partisans.

Additionally, in making the case for this vaccine, the Trump campaign must contend with overwhelming public disapproval of Trump's handling of the pandemic and widespread perceptions that he has misled Americans about the severity of the crisis. These issues, and his politicization of public health recommendations such as wearing masks, have created a credibility and trust gap for the Trump administration.

The Biden/Harris campaign, too, has a fine line to walk. The vaccine could be the greatest public health breakthrough in decades, and give a boost to the country's economic crisis, but it could also be terribly unsafe. Does the campaign position this news as another cynical and dangerous ploy by President Trump to win reelection? Or does the campaign urge at-risk populations to take a potentially life-saving vaccine? What does the campaign say to skeptical African American and Latinx supporters who make up the Democratic Party's base? And should the nation now trust the health officials who may be compromised by President Trump's political pressure? The campaign also needs to take a stand on the President's distribution strategy: does the vaccine need to go to other communities first?

South Carolina

The pandemic collides forcefully with issues of racial injustice and the election in South Carolina, where a U.S. Senate race has huge political implications for the balance of power in Congress. South Carolina is a reliably red state in presidential elections: Trump won it in 2016 by 15 points. The state has sent only one Democrat to the U.S. Senate since 1966, and the three-term Republican incumbent running for re-election, Sen. Lindsay Graham, has been untouchable since winning the seat in 2002.

This year, however, shifting demographics could change the landscape in this solidly Republican state. The third-ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives, Rep. James Clyburn, hails from South Carolina and has emerged as one of the most influential African Americans in the national Democratic Party. Clyburn famously rallied Black voters to Joe Biden in the state's early primary, tipping the nomination to Biden when his campaign seemed like a lost cause. Can an energized Black electorate, angry over the pandemic, Trump's race-baiting, and the economic crisis, signal the end of Lindsay Graham?

Graham is in a battle for his political life. His opponent, Jaime Harrison, is a Yale-trained African American lawyer and former head of the Democratic Party of South Carolina who is running neck-and-neck with Graham. Harrison has attracted huge fundraising support from people around the country who detest Graham and what they see as lapdog servility to Trump. Now Graham is on the ropes, making repeated appearances on Fox News to beg viewers to contribute funds to his campaign. Can Harrison achieve the once unthinkable – defeating a Trump loyalist for a statewide seat in South Carolina?

Background on Graham

Lindsay Graham, once a Trump critic, became one of the White House's earliest and most vocal defenders, risking his own credibility to demonstrate his loyalty to Trump. Most famously, as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, he went on a red-faced rant in defense of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in 2018 that earned him high marks from the President. Just last month, he unapologetically reversed comments from 2016 that a president should delay naming a Supreme Court Justice once an election season is underway. (He was for delaying only when the president was a Democrat.) While these moves have further enraged his detractors, his reputation as a confidante of Trump makes him popular with South Carolina's conservative White voters.

With one week to go until the election, in a tight race with Harrison, Graham must convince voters of South Carolina that the vaccine just released is a game-changer for COVID-19. Further, he will need to make the case that Trump is showing concern for marginalized populations (including those in South Carolina) by distributing the vaccines to these communities first.

Background on Harrison

Harrison, meanwhile, is banking on a massive turn-out among African American voters and on liberal Whites' animus toward Trump to help him unseat Graham. One challenge for Harrison is that African American voters are not monolithic, especially in South Carolina. Older African American voters made up the majority of those supporting Biden in the primary contest, while younger voters preferred more progressive Democrats like Bernie Sanders. Further, younger voters have tended to vote in lower numbers than older voters. Harrison must unite and motivate both groups to turn out for him *en masse*.

Harrison must also appeal to a small sliver of undecided and independent voters and Republicans who are fed up with Graham and Trump.

Harrison must somehow make the case against the vaccine and its distribution to BIPOC communities, knowing that the pandemic is taking a huge toll on these voters, whose support he needs most and who could benefit most from a safe, game-changing vaccine.

Speech #1: Lindsay Graham

Tomorrow, six days before the election, Graham will appear before the South Carolina Medical Association, which represents the state's doctors and health care practitioners, to lay out the Trump Administration plan for the new vaccine. A highly respected group of doctors and public health experts in the SCMA who work primarily with marginalized communities have told local media that they are considering boycotting the event given the lack of vaccine testing and Trump's overt politicization of strategies to deal with the pandemic. This is garnering big news and threatens to raise doubts about the vaccine even among some Republicans.

Write a 3-minute speech for Graham that focuses on his theory of the case (*logos*) for distributing a vaccine in such an early stage, especially to marginalized communities, and that reflects his need to appeal to a broader swath of voters than his usual hard-core Republican constituency. Take care also to use emotion (*pathos*) to appeal to your audience.

Speech #2: Jaime Harrison

Harrison sees the Trump administration's vaccine announcement as an opportunity to cement his political message, galvanize his supporters, and take votes away from Graham. Tomorrow, Harrison will address students at the University of South Carolina, a majority-White campus with an increasingly active BIPOC community. Students of color make up roughly one-third of the student body, and there are signs that the normally conservative campus is shifting politically thanks to a growing number of White students who are less conservative than their elders on social justice issues.

Write a 3-minute speech for Harrison that makes the case that the vaccine is a threat to social justice, that opposition to distributing it a week before the election is in the best interests of *all* South Carolinians, and that young people have a special responsibility to cast ballots in this election.

GROUPS

Groups One, Two, and Three will be writing for Graham:

Group One: Olivia, David, Rynn, Henry

Group Two: Caroline, Connor, Caelle, Harrison

Group Three: Will, Amaani, Jed, Maxine

Groups Four, Five, and Six will be writing for Harrison:

Group Four: Sanjeev, Dani, Owen, Casey

Group Five: Stella, Nick, Tigerlily, Spencer

Group Six: Japna, Annie, Jane, Mitchell