[**NATIONAL**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/) **THE WASHINGTON POST**

**Atlanta: Spelman College taps Helene Gayle as next president**

By Jeff Amy | AP

Today at 7:40 p.m. EDT

ATLANTA — Spelman College, one of the nation’s only two historically Black colleges for women, on Monday chose as its president an epidemiologist who spent decades fighting AIDS and HIV before becoming the leader of an international anti-poverty group.

Trustees of the private Atlanta college voted unanimously Monday to make Dr. Helene Gayle its 11th president, effective July 1. Current president Mary Schmidt Campbell announced her planned retirement last year.

Gayle will take over as the aftermath of the Black Lives Matter movement has propelled [a spike in private giving to Spelman and other historically Black colleges and universities](https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-health-government-and-politics-education-coronavirus-pandemic-ec534bfa6e4b89c7cd820e175a6477c7), especially those in the top tier.

Gayle, 66, is currently president of the Chicago Community Trust, a community foundation. She said that when she was approached about leading Spelman, she was attracted to it as “a place where young women can really tap into who they are, really develop a sense of confidence as women.”

The 2,400-student school is one of the nation’s top historically Black institutions, part of the Atlanta University Center, a consortium of four historically Black schools. Gayle said she wants to build on Spelman’s strength in sending students into careers in medicine, science, technology, engineering and math.

Trustee Kaye Foster said Spelman leaders liked Gayle’s ability to raise money in her Chicago position, saying the trust’s assets have risen from $2.8 billion to $4.7 billion under her leadership. The foundation has focused on reducing the racial and ethnic wealth gap in the city. Foster also cites Gayle’s ability to set and execute on priorities, her experience in working in large institutions and a career as a “humanitarian and a servant leader.”

“Even though she’s not a Spelman alum, in many ways, she has lived our Spelman motto,” Foster said. “She has made choices to change the world at every turn.”

Gayle lived for decades in Atlanta while working for the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. After a stint with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation [overseeing policy for HIV, tuberculosis and reproductive health](https://apnews.com/article/dd8311081c0d50f86a1225dd281ce5ed), she returned to Atlanta as President and CEO of CARE USA, a key part of an international humanitarian group that fights poverty by focusing on women and girls. She’s also a member of the board of the Coca-Cola Co., an Atlanta corporate icon.

Trained as a pediatrician, Gayle has received 18 honorary degrees, including from Emory University and the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta and Agnes Scott College in Decatur.

Spelman and other HBCUs have been focused on reducing costs and loans obtained by students. Today, more than three-quarters of Spelman students get need-based aid, but 92% end up with loans, borrowing more than $27,000 on average, according to data published by the college.

Gayle said she plans to pitch donors on the idea that HBCUs are effective in helping poorer students rise out of poverty, reducing income inequality. “Any woman who has the academic background and has the desire to have an education at Spelman ought to be able to do that, and ought to be able to do that without having to amass the kind of debt that is oftentimes crippling for somebody who’s starting out in their career,” Gayle said.

She also said she intends to focus on a key student-life concern, a lack of on-campus housing at Spelman. Less than 60% of students live on campus today.

“I think there’s creative ways in which we can think about this issue,” Gayle said. “It was made a priority and it will be a priority for me.”

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Spelman College taps public health leader as finalist for president



Caption

[**EDUCATION**](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/www.ajc.com/education/__;!!ATJcLOt_!zj6NuDl0e5NhoPJW_qyJPbMWOC85JN1-9Mn87J1Pt4r5xtsc5vfTUzqyiAr_FkV9NBgJMzWWED1-f2ldifwjSVO34A$)

**By**[**Eric Stirgus**](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/www.ajc.com/staff/eric-stirgus/__;!!ATJcLOt_!zj6NuDl0e5NhoPJW_qyJPbMWOC85JN1-9Mn87J1Pt4r5xtsc5vfTUzqyiAr_FkV9NBgJMzWWED1-f2ldifxgtmKO4g$)**, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution**

3 hours ago

**Board scheduled to vote on nomination later today**

A global public health expert who has helped the federal government with its COVID-19 vaccine outreach efforts may soon become Spelman College’s next president.

Dr. [Helene Gayle](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/www.cct.org/people/dr-helene-gayle/__;!!ATJcLOt_!zj6NuDl0e5NhoPJW_qyJPbMWOC85JN1-9Mn87J1Pt4r5xtsc5vfTUzqyiAr_FkV9NBgJMzWWED1-f2ldifzd71zHTQ$) is the finalist to lead the private, historically Black college for women, located near downtown Atlanta. Spelman’s board of trustees is scheduled to vote this evening on Gayle’s nomination.

“I feel like my background in public health and medicine and in the sciences can be a real value,” Gayle told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

*Article continues below*

Spelman’s current president, Mary Schmidt Campbell, is [retiring](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/www.ajc.com/education/ajc-exclusive-spelman-college-president-announces-retirement-in-june-2022/MGK5EKN7ZRARXEXI4IR6EZJYXQ/__;!!ATJcLOt_!zj6NuDl0e5NhoPJW_qyJPbMWOC85JN1-9Mn87J1Pt4r5xtsc5vfTUzqyiAr_FkV9NBgJMzWWED1-f2ldifxfoKyyqQ$) in June.

Gayle, 66, currently leads the Chicago Community Trust, an organization that works to address wealth and equity gaps in that region. She was co-chair of a federal committee that worked to ensure equitable allocations of COVID-19 vaccines.

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Gayle said her primary goal is making Spelman more affordable for students. Many of Spelman’s 2,200 students come from low-income households. About 80% of its students are taking out federal student loans, according to federal government data.

Gayle has Atlanta roots through her prior work at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and as CARE USA’s CEO for about nine years. Music superstar Bono once called Gayle “my queen” for her advice on how his nonprofit should address poverty and disease.

Explore [CARE chief: ‘Raise your hand and do something different’](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/www.ajc.com/business/care-chief-raise-your-hand-and-something-different/tsD2GW7hEKljCDi0YhNGMK/__;!!ATJcLOt_!zj6NuDl0e5NhoPJW_qyJPbMWOC85JN1-9Mn87J1Pt4r5xtsc5vfTUzqyiAr_FkV9NBgJMzWWED1-f2ldifwXrTqbbA$)

One potential challenge for Gayle in leading Spelman is she has no administrative experience in higher education. Gayle, though, said she feels “very comfortable” in higher education, noting she’s been an adjunct professor at Emory University and at the University of Washington.

Spelman board member Kaye Foster said the lack of management experience in higher education was not a concern for the board. Foster said Gayle’s work in underserved communities, implementing strategies in combating HIV/AIDS at the CDC and growing the trust’s assets from about $3 billion to roughly $4.5 billion made her the best of among 300 candidates Spelman’s board considered for the job.

Gayle’s expertise in public health was also a plus, said Foster, the presidential search committee chair.

“She has made choices to change the world in every domain that she’s been in,” Foster said in an interview.