

Trump Meets With 20 Pastors From Inner City at White House

Dr. Alveda King and Bill Owens, president of the Coalition of African American Pastors, answered reporters' questions after meeting with President Donald Trump Monday at the White House.

Facing growing accusations of racism for his incendiary tweets, President Donald Trump lashed out at his critics Monday and sought to deflect the criticism by labeling Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Maryland, as a racist. He also expanded his attacks on the Rev. Al Sharpton, a prominent Cummings defender, who held a press conference in Baltimore to condemn the president.

"I have known Al for 25 years. Went to fights with him & Don King, always got along well. He 'loved Trump!,' the president wrote. "He would ask me for favors often. Al is a con man, a troublemaker, always looking for a score. Just doing his thing. Must have intimidated Comcast/NBC. Hates Whites & Cops!"

Trump convened what he called a group of "wonderful inner city Pastors" for an unannounced closed-door meeting to discuss the issues facing the black community Monday.

"This country needs healing. There's so much division in America along racial lines," said Bill Owens, president of the Coalition of African American Pastors, who said he was among about 20 pastors who had met with the president.

"He wanted to know from us: What should he do in America? What best can he do?" Owens said of Trump, insisting the gathering "was not damage control."

Asked by a reporter whether he thought Trump was racist, Owens said he found that “hard to believe,” but said the president could do more to address racism in the country, “absolutely.”

Owens repeatedly mentioned the opportunity zones and prison reform as steps that the president has taken to help the black community and said pastors told him during Monday’s meeting what else he could be doing.

“This country needs healing,” Owens said. “There’s so much division in America along racial lines.”

Dr. Alveda King, the niece of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and a longtime Trump supporter, also noted Trump’s longtime relationships with Sharpton and civil rights activist Jesse Jackson.

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