

Jamaal Willis, CA - 2021

Before coming into the United States Senate Youth Program, I had a multitude of questions regarding diplomacy, American legal precedent, the current administration, and controversial matters of the state that I needed to be answered. Although they weren't all answered, speaking with high elected officials taught me that whenever you pose a problem you need a solution--probe the issue and come up with a rational plan. I immigrated to America four years ago and never would I imagine that I would be given the opportunity to hold a platform like the United States Senate Youth Program. When I met Senator Alex Padilla for the first time, he too expressed astonishment about being sworn into the Senate.

In all honesty, when I arrived on Sunday, I thought I would have been overwhelmed with imposter syndrome. However, that wasn't the case this time. Being surrounded by individuals who have the same conviction for politics and policy made me enthralled to be in their presence. I especially loved being around individuals in opposition to political ideologies or beliefs in comparison to my own. For instance, Justice Clarence Thomas--who is known for his more conservative judicial philosophical dissent-- is the epitome of black excellence. Even though I do not agree with his rulings on numerous Supreme Court cases, he has shown me what it means to overcome adversity and be in the room when decisions are being made. If you are not in the room the conversation is about you, but when you are in the room the conversation is with you. Transparency and truth are at the cornerstone of American democracy, without it our democracy will implode. He also reiterated the need for us to be educated and create our own narratives. Our ability to disagree shapes our identities but when there is place for compromise it metamorphizes our collective society.

I believe my life is measured by the amount of people I can help. The thing that separates a lot of us in this world is a line. A motile line that entraps those behind it in inequity, the line of opportunity. I've learned that when democracy doesn't want to see you achieve, you fight harder for yourself and everyone behind you in that line to be heard. It's not good enough for someone to open the door of opportunity, but we must hold that door open for the next individual in line. We should do whatever necessary to take under-resourced and underrepresented communities through that door: DACA, the dreamers, LGBTQ+, Latinx, African American, Asian, and everyone else who is excluded from reaching this proverbial line.

My philosophy in life is, "I do what I do not for myself but, for those around me and the betterment of my community." The United States Senate Youth Program has reassured me of my aspirations and fueled me to continue conquering any obstacle that obstructs my journey.

My Goal: litigator (6 years), to diplomat (10 years), and then a senator.

As a civil rights or criminal justice attorney, I want all my incarcerated brothers and sisters to have the right to due process. As a diplomat, I want to be immersed in global political cultures, demolish international law that wrongfully criminalizes queer people, and emancipate developing nations from modern mental slavery. Lastly, as a senator of the United States Senate, I need to implement legislation that propels the voices of my disadvantaged constituents.

From our Military Mentors to American astronauts in space to U.S. ambassadors and to the president of the United States, their service is a call to action for the younger generation. With serious global and domestic issues to address, we need to stand up, act up, and speak up for what we unequivocally believe in. Stand firm in our beliefs, be open-minded to contrasting political views, and always be prepared to serve the greatest nation on Earth.