

Transcript for “Building an Inclusive Democracy with Rep. Ayanna Pressley,” sponsored by
Suffolk Votes and the Black Student Union, Feb. 24, 2022

Gloria Bouquet (00:00)

Hello, good afternoon everyone. I just wanna thank everyone for coming and attending via Zoom. My name is Gloria Bouquet. I am a junior political science major here at Suffolk. I'm also an office assistant in the CCE, the Center for Community Engagement which houses Suffolk Votes. And I just want to also say thank you to Suffolk Votes and Black Student Union for sponsoring this event and now I will pass it over to Aria who will briefly discuss Black Student Union.

Aria (00:32)

Thank you, Gloria. Hello! Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you all are having a great day. My name is aria, I use she/her pronouns, undergraduate law major, with a double minor in math and Spanish. I am a diversity peer educator, at the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion that does a lot of social justice work. But today I'm going to be talking about the Black Student Union because I am the Vice President this year. So the Black Student Union does a great amount of work around racial justice and Black justice. So it does a lot of work around education, you know, educating other folks on racial justice in general, a lot of conversations within our own community such as colorism, misogynoir, etc., and also, of course, just celebration. You know, this is black history month. We recognize the history but we also talk about, you know, celebration and things that we've achieved within our community. And of course, racial justice in general within the black community and the African diaspora, so we have conversations within the Suffolk community, within our students, faculty, and also just the Boston area in general.

Gloria (1:33)

I'll hand it over to Suffolk Votes.

Jessica Mejia (2:10)

Hello everybody, thank you for being here! My name is Jessica Mejia. I am a grad fellow at the Center for Community Engagement. I work in the Suffolk Votes department. I help oversee the Suffolk Votes Ambassadors. I want to tell you a little bit of our department. So before that, please follow us on our handles @Ssuffolkvotes at Instagram, all that jazz. Thank you.

Okay, so what is Suffolk Votes? We are a nonpartisan program through the Center for Community Engagement that helps students achieve their civic potential. What do we do? We register peers to vote. We educate about upcoming of elections. We get students to the poll. We engage elected officials, we teach organizing skills, and we connect to community advocates. And it's really fun, because we have students we have the power to do all these things, and we're doing it for you, so it's really nice to be able to do it as a camaraderie and it's great to see each other's ideologies and differences. So please, join us!

Okay, why vote? That's what we do at Suffolk! For US citizens it is one of the best ways to make your voice heard and elect representatives who represent your interest. In the 2016 general election 83% of Suffolk students were registered to vote. That's pretty awesome! 67% of those Suffolk students voted. Suffolk University earned the 2016 and 2018 silver seal student voting rate from the All-In Campus Democracy Challenge.

So please use our- what are these called? Thank you! Codes to follow us. Oh, actually no, no, I'm, sorry this is the where we have QR codes to register to vote in Massachusetts and if you're not, please follow the secondary one if you're from any other state.

Interested in becoming a Suffolk Votes Ambassador? What are the benefits? Well, here are some yeah. It's a great way to gain leadership skills through public speaking and organizational skills. You meet other like-minded students and help share accurate and important information about elections.

Okay, Let's Talk About That! So we have this series of events. They're conversations that center around different topics, such as voting rights, government's responsibilities, censorship, and homelessness. So it's basically just kind of like an open forum. We encourage people of different backgrounds to get together and talk about these issues. These are the dates that are being held: March 7th, March, 20th, March 28th, and April 16th. Please join us. You will walk away with a deeper understanding of the issue at hand and the viewpoints of others even if there is a disagreement.

Thank you so much for your time for your patience. And again, please follow us in one of these. Thank you. And we are also located in the Sawyer building room 824. So if you ever want to come by, hang out, check us out in person, feel free. Thank you.

Aria (6:01)

Thank you so much for that, Jessica. Just briefly, before we get started, I just wanted to ask folks, what are they hoping to see today? Or what are they hoping to hear today? And you can also drop something in the chat as well. Yes,

Matt (6:21)

I'm hoping to just get a deeper understanding of the importance of voting.

Gloria (6:27)

Deeper understanding the importance of voting, yes, that is very important to understand. Yes.

Gloria (6:43)

Yes, yes, we will get into that. So she said, just hoping to see how a woman of color, a black woman was able to you know, to get into office and be at this leadership position. Any other thoughts about that? Anything that you're hoping to get out of this event today? Is there anything in the chat? I know I saw one person here. Yes.

Unknown Speaker (7:16)

I guess advice from Congress, how young people can make change in our local communities?

Gloria (7:23)

Yes, yes. Advice from a congresswoman on how young people can get involved. That's very important. And that is what we do, actually, at the CCE. So drop by anytime!

Aria (7:43)

Okay, so I can give a little bit of a rundown of how the rest of today is gonna go. So of course Ayanna Pressley is going to be coming in in a few minutes. We do have some premade questions that was developed by Suffolk Votes. So again, thank you. We have a couple of questions that we're going to be asking here. Of course, we'll get responses. And then at the end, you all will be able to reflect. We're going to ask you some reflecting questions based on you know, any feedback, any thoughts, anything that resonated from the time? So do think about that, while listening to her and the questions that we ask, or even if there are any other additional questions, maybe for future events that we have like this, that you would also want to have included within the conversation? Does anyone have any questions about how today's gonna go? comments or concerns? Look at the chat also.

Gloria (8:28)

So we have a few, quite a few answers in the chat. I'm seeking inspiration and strategies from representative Presley on how to prepare for the midterm elections. Yes. And how the most recent census redistricting will impact our election? Yes, that's very important. Does anybody also have any questions just about Suffolk Votes or the CCE or Black Student Union? Yes?

Jessica (8:54)

Do you have to be black in order to join?

Aria (8:57)

No, you do not need to be black in order to join. I'll hold it, yeah. We really do pride ourselves in making sure that we include everyone within the conversation, we definitely believe that racial justice is an intersectional issue. So not only having conversations within the black community, but also making sure people that are not black are learning from us, and also, you know, being better allies. And that so I think, regardless of what your identity is, racially, you can join our meetings. Yes?

Unknown Speaker (9:30)

I tried to go Tuesday, and they didn't.

Aria (9:33)

Yeah, so we normally have Black Student Union meetings every other Tuesday. So if there's one Tuesday where last you saw us last Tuesday, and it's not that Tuesday, we normally try to interchange with the Caribbean Student Network as well. So yeah, you'll get an email if you're on the email list also.

Gloria (9:46)

I think I saw another hand... yes. For the email list for the email list for CCE? For Black Student Union?

Aria (9:57)

Yeah, so sorry a lot of back and forth. In order to sign up, I can also take your information at the end of this to get on the email list is always updating. But at the beginning of every Black Student Union meeting, we normally have a time where we get a sign in sheet with your name,

your year and your email just to make sure that that email list is updated. So if you want, I can reach out to you and we can get you on the email list if you're interested.

Gloria (10:24)

Okay, any other questions or thoughts about anything? Anything that we're excited about? Well, I'm very excited. You know, me being black raised female in Boston to be hearing from another person who is a black Congresswoman, it's very exciting for me to see that it's very inspirational. Also, being a political science major, you know, wanting to enter that field. So I'm very excited today.

Unknown Speaker (10:57)

Why do you think it's so important to vote and be involved in the political process?

Gloria (11:02)

I think voting is very important because the political sphere expect- it impacts your life. In multiple ways. Like a lot of people think that, you know, politics is just talk, or it's just like media, or on TV, stuff like that. But it impacts every section of your life, especially local elections. And so, you know, if you have a problem, like with the T, or if you have a problem with like, where you're living, or just anything like that, like, all of that comes from voting and who is representing you, and how they can make changes in your community. So I think it's very important to be involved and be engaged, especially for youth, because youth often don't get a chance to voice their opinions. And, you know, if you're able to vote, I think you should. What do you think Aria?

Aria (11:51)

I definitely agree, I think youth are at the forefront of every social justice movement. And I think being involved in voting, especially historically, you know, black and brown folks have not been able to vote in an accessible way compared to our white counterparts. So I think if you do have access to voting, have the ability to, using it so that future generations might not have to experience what we do, or previous, you know, my ancestors did, especially. So I think, having opportunities to vote having access to vote, and if you don't have the access to vote, making sure you getting civically engaged is definitely important. I am also a black woman. And I was also raised in Boston. And I did, of course, learn within my education system, I was privileged enough to you know, see the value of my vote. But there are so many other regions or just parts of the country in general, where they're taught that their voices don't matter if they're not within a

certain spectrum in terms of your identity. So I think having access to vote, educating others, and using that vote is definitely important, especially within Massachusetts and having the sphere that we have here. Yes!

Unknown Speaker (12:57)

Other than voting, what's the what's like your best second best way in order to get involved in actually advocacy?

Gloria (13:04)

Well, why don't we have Suffolk votes? Speak to that a little bit? Okay, we're gonna have Syeeda come down. Thank you so much. What's the question? I'm sorry, can I- just can you repeat the question one time?

Unknown Speaker (13:31)

Other than voting, what's the second best way that you can get involved into advocacy?

Gloria (13:36)

Okay, other than voting, what is the best way to get into the community and advocacy.

Syeeda (13:42)

So there's a lot of different ways that you can, you know, be involved in the community and become an advocate. If you're not able to vote, you can join Suffolk Votes and help people sign up to go get out to vote, and learn about their representatives. But if you're interested in issue, create a campaign, go join a campaign that already exists, do some research, watch documentaries, read books. There's just so many different ways that you can, you know, get educated on what's going on around you to create a change. And the best way is really to get together with other people who have like-minded interests and thoughts and, you know, create something to make that change. And if you don't know where to start, we're always here, the CCE is here. We have a lot of different programs. And the in Suffolk, there's so many different like affinity groups, if you are part of an affinity groups are interested to go and join their movements to help, you know, create some sort of change.

Aria (14:39)

Sure. I also think too, like especially there's a lot of opportunities on campus, but again, talking about young people. There are a ton of amazing youth groups that are within the greater Boston area that are doing such amazing work around social justice issues. That honestly, it's just a click away. I think you should find the balance of like, finding social justice issues or voting issues or community based organizations that, you know, you are inspired by, or know a good amount about, but also you don't know a lot about so that you're learning from different people and different perspectives and gaining that as well. So I think there's there's so many spectrums within the Boston area, too, in terms of like outside of Suffolk if you want to get more involved in your community outside of just downtown Boston and on campus too, just like trying to find the balance of all that. But of course, it's a process. We're all constantly learning, and just finding the research I think is important.

Gloria (15:29)

Yeah, just to add on to that, or just to reiterate some points, I think education is at the forefront of that. Just you know, educating yourself and educating others around you, is just the start and the basis for all of that. But thank you so much. What do y'all think about voting? And youth voice? Yes.

Unknown Speaker (15:49)

So I used to work for a nonprofit that was based Boston, I also live in Boston. And we have a lot of guest speakers, I was a teenager at the time and to speak. I never realized like the even like voting and like small elections can have a big impact on your community, like I was taught that if you if you're to like community is more pro than voting more, like more, you'll get more things done in your community. Your streets are a mess. If your community is more active, and both voted Bella Gabler fits a straight fit fits infrastructure, things like that, and I was even taught that. So it was just like little things can't be just better when you're more active in your community.

Gloria (16:32)

Yes, it's very important to be an active participant in your community. Um, you know, communities that have multiple active, active participants, you know, they often get more resources in that way. Yeah. Does anybody else have any other thoughts? Or even questions? Anything in the chat, see? Yes.

Unknown Speaker (17:06)

What are some, like current things you guys are currently doing in terms of like activism?

Syedda (17:17)

Um, well, if we're talking about, we can talk about Suffolk Votes. And then I can say like some things I'm doing personally, if that's helpful. Um, so at Suffolk Votes, as Jessica talked about, the Let's Talk About That Events is like one of the big things we're doing because we've noticed that like, polarization has just increased in the US. And there needs to be a way that we can all you know, work together towards some common goal, even when we have such you know, varying viewpoints. So, if you're interested in like learning more about different viewpoints than yours, Let's Talk About That events are great. I know like I hear amazing things about them. And I hear such a different opinions than I would ever have. Because I'm, you know, aligned a specific way politically. And it's still interesting to hear other people who, you know, are aligned differently. And a lot of our events, we have, you know, guest speakers, we have people come in from the government, from different areas to talk about what they're doing. Personally, I work a lot within a private sector, where I work with different clients, like the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, or Massachusetts Department of Housing. And I've recently just ran a campaign to help people who are facing eviction to get, you know, rental assistance. So there's many ways to get involved. There's also like, they said, there are great organizations that you can get involved in, I'm involved with the Girls Inc, and I used to go there when I was a kid. And now I, you know, mentor people and, you know, help run programming. So if there's any organizations that you're interested in, that would be a great way to kind of, you know, volunteer and get started.

Aria (18:56)

Sure, so I've been doing a lot of social justice work since I was really young, around maybe 10 or 11 years old when I was figuring out my identity. But more specifically, I did a lot of environmental justice work as a young person within the district. So I worked within Boston Public Schools and worked with youth organizers and such to make sure that there was environmental justice work that was happening in schools and making sure that students were getting a lot of climate education because that tends to be, you know, ignored within our, within our education system within Boston. So making sure that youth were educated in that, and of course, also informing students on their rights as individuals like just because you go to a public school, or just because you're in high school, or just because you're young, that doesn't mean that you're meant to just experience adultism or this idea that because you're young, you don't

know anything, you don't have power within your district. So really just making sure that you get that sense of confidence and Civic Engagement before going into situations where like you're in college or you experienced oppression yourself or just trying to be an ally. So I think there are a lot of sectors of work there. I've done a good amount of but on campus, I'm really involved in the racial justice work on campus around Black Student Union. And I'm also a Diversity Peer Educator, which does a lot of trainings and workshops and conversations around social justice issues from a variety of things. So if you have any other questions, let me know.

Gloria (20:15)

Thank you. I just want to thank everyone for asking questions and answering questions. Now I'm just going to briefly introduce representative Pressley. She needs no introduction, but still. So yes, Representative Ayana Pressley represents the seventh congressional district of Massachusetts, which includes parts of Boston, Cambridge, Milton, Chelsea, Everett, Randolph and Somerville. She also is the first black woman to be elected to Boston City Council and to Congress from Massachusetts. Yeah, she'll be joining in just a minute. Thank you so much for your patience. And here she is.

Ayanna Pressley (22:29)

I'm here but it says the host has stopped my video to see until anyway, yeah. Okay. I'm here to take your time

Unknown Speaker (23:12)

Just one second, technical difficulties.

Ayanna Pressley (23:16)

I'm not in a rush to take your time, okay.

Gloria (23:28)

Um, could you try turning on your video now? There we go. Oh, you're muted.

Ayanna Pressley (23:53)

That is working, okay, I'll take it!

Gloria (23:56)

Well, thank you so much for joining us. I guess we'll just get right into it. We did briefly introduce you, but you need no introduction. But yes. So we just wanted to ask, how did you start your journey and to get to where you are now. And what do you think the rest of that journey looks like?

Ayanna Pressley (24:20)

Sure. Well, just before I get into the Q&A, I just want to offer some top line remarks just to contextualize our chat for today and just say um how much I've been looking forward to being in virtual community with all of you and I look forward to having the opportunity to be in a beloved community in person once this public health crisis is behind us. But it is certainly restorative and affirming to join you virtually today to be with you, organizers and justice seekers, disruptors and community builders. I appreciate you immensely and I want to thank Matthew and Adam and Suffolk Votes and the BSU and all of you for hosting this important conversation today. It's very full circle in many ways, in that it is my student civic engagement and activism while a student at Boston University, which ultimately changed the trajectory of my life. For those of you who are not aware, I'm originally from Chicago. So Boston is an adopted home. I here- I'll date myself, but that's quite alright. I just received an invitation actually, to cohost my 30th high school reunion. So I came here in 1992, to attend Boston University. And continuing through the leadership roles that I had assumed while in high school, as a competitive debater, and co-president of my student government and class president for many years in high school, I continued on that trajectory once I was at Boston University. And while I was a student, a senator and president of my college, I pursued a political internship- an unpaid internship- at the office of former congressman Joseph P. Kennedy II, and I worked three paid jobs to do that unpaid internship. I'm proud to say that today, in Congress, we pay our interns a living wage. That has been a barrier to access so many of us, but it's very surreal that that internship, ultimately led to a paid position in the office of that Congressman, but 25 plus years later, I am now the congresswoman for that seat that I began in as an unpaid intern 25 plus years ago while a student at Boston University. So I know that the power of student leadership and of youth voice, and that's why I've been so very much looking forward to this conversation. You asked me sort of about my origin story, if you will, and I'll err towards brevity, but I'll give the abridged version. I think it's important to start at the beginning. The beginning for me is my mother, may she rest in peace and power. That's the most important part of my bio, you just say Sandy Pressley's daughter, that has been the most formidably shaping and defining thing about me. And just a quick digression. My mother, in her 50s was in between careers and

experiencing ageism while she was applying for jobs, and she asked me to look over her resume to give her some feedback on things that she could do to be more competitive. And at the top of the resume, it said Ayanna Pressley's Mom. And I said, "Well, mom, you know, people are going to think you're eccentric and odd. You can't keep that on your resume, you have to take that off." And she said, "You could change anything else you want. But that stays because you're my proudest achievement." So may my mother, Sandy Pressley rest in peace and power, she was a community builder and an activist and a proud Democrat and a super voter. And she taught me so many important lessons, and a couple of- some of that wisdom I want to share with you today. And this really just shaped how I move and navigate. And the first is that in life, there's a difference between your job and your work. Your job is what you do to pay the bills, but what my mother referred to as the work with a capital W. That is the work of the upliftment and advancement of community. And she also made sure that I knew that being black is something beautiful and to be proud of, but that I was being born into a struggle. And she had an expectation that I would do my part in that struggle in the work of a black liberation, of liberating black people and all marginalized people. And so, you know, I share those two pieces of wisdom there, or rather, one piece of wisdom and one piece of reality, and also a challenge, you know, call to action for all of you, especially now. You know, we find ourselves in unprecedented times, it really do demand of us unprecedented organizing and compassion and unprecedented leadership, while we are bearing the weight of these three crises- a global pandemic, economic inequality, persistent racial injustice. We need leadership, we need movement, building, we need policies that meet the moment, and that center the voices and lived experiences of those closest to the pain. That is my mantra and my practice. The people close to the pain should be the closest to the power, driving and informing the policymaking. And so that only happens when our democracy works and our democracy only works with every person has a seat at the table and all of our communities are represented in the halls of power. And when we all vote. And we still have so much work to do in Congress and in all of our communities. I want to quote the great Latasha Brown, co founder of Black Voters Matter, who says that organized power is realized power. And young people, Black, Brown and Indigenous organized and the disability community have been on the frontlines organizing to build power, and to advance policies that meet the moment. You know, young people turned out in record numbers, and made my election to Congress possible in 2018. In some student communities, we grew the student vote by 400%. But we believe that organizing and an engagement and power building are for more than just an election cycle. And so we do that work of engagement year round. I'm a firm believer that when people don't participate, it's not because they're ignorant or apathetic or don't

know any better. It's because they know too much. They're too informed, based on years, decades, centuries, of broken promises and broken hearts. And I feel tremendous responsibility to afford them that first faith in government in the role that it will play in their lives, or if they had that hope, and it's been dashed, to restore it. And so that is the work that we're all doing, you know, in the work of mobilizing black lives against every social injustice and great indignation that we're facing currently as a society. So, you know, I- fast forward, you know, as I said, I came here to attend Boston University. An internship sort of changed the trajectory of my life. I worked for a member of Congress for 4 and a half years. I worked for Senator for 11 years, United States Senator John Kerry. And then I served on the Boston City Council for eight years and I've been in Congress for three. And so, so far as what the future holds, I'm just following the work. I think it's very important to not obsess about trajectory or titles or position, but to focus on the impact you seek to make and to work backwards from that. So it's most important to sort of crystallize and distill your purpose. And I knew the impact that I wanted to have was to root out systemic injustice and to replace policies that have fostered liberation - policies which have created oppression and replace them with policies which support liberation, to replace policies that have exacted hurt and harm with policies that promote and foster healing. And so to me, that meant serving on the federal level because many of the racial injustices that persist that are so deeply embedded are the consequence of federal policy. So from here, I'm just really focused on this moment and making sure that we have a just and equitable and robust recovery in this pandemic induced recession. And of course, that we continue to combat and successfully beat this virus. So other than that, I'm just following the work and staying prayerful, listening to God. That's it.

Gloria (33:26)

Well, thank you so much for sharing that. And I think that actually goes right into our next question.

Aria (33:32)

Yes, hello. Hi, how are you? My name is Aria. When transitioning into the next question, you touched on this a little bit, but when thinking about you know, the historical factors of our country and our democracy, how do you think the United States could achieve a multiracial, inclusive democracy moving forward?

Ayanna Pressley (33:50)

Sure. Well there's several priorities. I think we need to advance policy at the federal level that push back against overtly racist, systemic efforts to disenfranchise black and brown voters, young voters, immigrants, and the disabled community. I'm working hard to grow the Democratic majority in the Senate by at least two votes so that we can abolish the filibuster and the Jim Crow filibuster, which has obstructed progress and the actualization of justice at every turn. We need to be intentional about reaching out and engaging with people who have been historically ignored, left out and left behind- those who have become disaffected with our democracy and give them a reason to take a stake hold in our government and I'm a firm believer that the ultimate persuasion tool is impact. What will incentivize people to engage, make sure that they can feel that the impact of a good policy and government and see it all around them so they never have to question or wonder. And, you said a multi racial inclusive democracy. I think it's important that we're intentional and inclusive and our movement building as well. And as a voter, I'll just say nothing- well, I can't say nothing angers me more, there's many things. I have righteous indignation about many things these days. But what I will say as a voter, what I find frustrating is when lawmakers single issue a constituency. And so they'll come to black folks, and then just talk about mass incarceration. They'll come to the Hispanic and Latinx community and only talk about immigration reform. They'll come to women and only speak of reproductive justice. They'll come to the LGBTQ community and only speak of perhaps marriage equality or trans rights. They'll come to the disability community and, and only speak of the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act. And they probably don't go to the indigenous or Asian community at all. The point here is, is that we have to demand more. And we don't live in big checkboxes. We live in intersectionality. We live in nuance. We live in complexity. And our policies have to reflect that. And so when we advance policies that are intersectional and where people can see and feel the impact tangibly of government and good policy all around them, I think that that's how we'll ultimately have a multi racial and inclusive democracy. People will be motivated and incentivize to participate. And as I said, we have to abolish the filibuster and restore voting rights. So those are some of the ways that we get that.

Aria (36:33)

Thank you so much. I definitely agree that representation and intersectionality are definitely important. Thank you. It's gonna transition it back to Gloria.

Gloria (36:43)

Yes. So you spoke a little bit about, you know, single issue, and also the disenfranchisement of black and brown voters. So what do you see are the most pressing issues that we must tackle, to make our democracy inclusive to work for everyone, especially black and brown community members?

Ayanna Pressley (37: 03)

I'll say as an organizing principle we have to be willing to be disruptive, you know, to really challenge the status quo way of doing things because it has not resulted in a multiracial and inclusive democracy. I think we're making great strides. You know, when I look at young people at the forefront of every social movement right now, whether it's gun reform, or climate justice, or dismantling mass incarceration, or canceling student debt, or addressing the existential threat, that is the climate crisis. That movement is increasingly one that is multigenerational and multiracial and representative of every socio-economic group. And we just have to sustain that and keep that up. You know I- my physical office in Washington is in the Longworth building, and it's office 1108. And that office used to be Shirley Chisholm's office, the first black woman elected to Congress and the first black woman to pursue the US presidency. And I'm sure you've heard the quote, and I used to say it often myself that if they don't give you a seat at the table, bring your own folding chair. Well I actually don't say that anymore. I've amended it. Because if we bring a new chair to an old table, nothing changes. We have to build a create an entirely new table. And that is ultimately, you know, how we will have a multiracial and inclusive democracy. And the work that we're doing right now to get us there are some of the things that I'm proudest of- our willingness to disrupt and challenge the status quo and conventional wisdom about how to build movements, about how to, to win electoral campaigns. And then finally, there's been much ado about the role that black voters play in the ballot box, and increasingly so that black candidates or elected officials incumbents running for reelection that we play at the ballot box, but increasingly so now, it's not just about voters and elected officials, but it's about the organizers. And that is something that is a tremendous source of pride for me, having worked in every part of politics, that finally those those organizers, those movement builders, those strategists who continue the blueprint of the civil rights movement and their tactics and their mobilization efforts. I'm glad that many of those organizers like Latasha Brown, who I mentioned earlier, are finally being recognized for their expertise and their brilliance.

Gloria (39:38)

Yes, change requires a lot of work. And I agree with a lot of what you said.

Aria (39:45)

Right, thank you. You pretty much answered the next question in terms of what you're the most proud of. So I do want to rephrase it a little bit. When thinking about future generations of voters, voters that helped you get into your elected position, what do you think is necessary in order to motivate them to get out to vote in the first place? Or what do you normally do in order to embrace change within young people or future generations in general?

Ayanna Pressley (40:11)

Well, first thing is I don't patronize young people. You know, I'm well aware that young people are saddled with adult burdens, fears and responsibilities and so I engage them accordingly. I don't patronize or condescend. And I actively listen and learn and I'm led by youth voice. And I don't single issue or silo young people. I'm not only speaking to young people about student debt. I know the young people care about everything. You care if your grandmother can age as safely in community. You care about the solvency of Social Security and whether or not it will be there for you in the future. You care about whether or not your water is drinkable, and the air you breathe is clean. You care about all of it. Just because you're you surpass the age of preschool doesn't mean that you're not equally passionate about the need for universal childcare and pre-K, recognizing how fundamental that is to the trajectory of one's life. Doesn't mean you don't care about housing justice. I know that you all care about everything. Again, you live in intersectionality. And so those are the ways in which I seek to seriously engage young people. I don't patronize, I don't condescend, and I actively enlist them as problem solvers in the work. And I'm also seeking to eliminate some of the barriers, I actually introduced an amendment to lower the voting age in federal elections to 16. And I cannot believe the controversial response and affront that I was met with for that. But young people, you are the foot soldiers on the frontlines of every movement. You're working jobs, contributing to our tax base, you're caring for younger siblings. You know, you deserve to have that power at the ballot box. And so those are some of the ways with which I engage young people and most of all, to look up the issues that are the most important to them, including the need to cancel a student debt which after leaving that fight in the house, I think we need to abolish the death penalty, we need to radically reimagine our criminal legal system, we have to continue to fight for immigration system, which centers the dignity and humanity of all people who have to pass Medicare for all. As I said earlier, we need to abolish the filibuster and pass the Voting Rights Act. And I think ultimately, the other way that I seek to engage people, young people and all

people is the reminder that our freedoms and our destinies are tied. I don't know if many of you had the opportunity to see the bio-documentary Women in the Movement, featuring on Mamie Till, Emmett Till's mother, and she said, you know, what happens to one of us have better be the business of all of us. And that is the point, you know, that our destinies are truly tied. So making that point as often as I can.

Gloria (42:58)

Yes. And you mentioned some of the barriers. So what challenges do you see in terms of turnout and voting among communities in our district?

Ayanna Pressley (43:10)

Yeah, I think first and foremost, you have to demonstrate to people that their organizing, their mobilizing, that their voting leads to real meaningful change. As I said earlier, quoting the great Latasha Brown that organized power is realized power. So we have to demonstrate that, show that. We need to deliver real change to our communities, change that our communities deserve, and demand show folks the value of their engagement. You know, that when I engage them when I'm invested, and when I have skin in the game, that when I'm vigilant, and I'm a part of a sustained movement, that I can see the change that our community so desperately desire and need. And we need to be continually intentional about tearing down barriers to voting and ensuring that folks have the information and the resources that they need to participate, they have to safeguard the fundamental right to vote, you know, every time, it is harder for someone to vote because it is not a holiday, or because there isn't mail-in voting, or early voting or same-day registration you're disenfranchising people. Anytime you make it harder for people to access the ballot, you're disincentivizing their participation. I think also we need civics. You know, I don't think that people sort of spontaneously combust at the age of 18 and suddenly give a damn about their democracy and in participating. We have to foster that relationship and make this something that is habitual. We have to do that as early as possible. And that's why we need civics you know, I think in elementary school in high school. Right now access to that sort of information about how government works, or what's happening in the news every day, that sort of curriculum is really arbitrary. And it's something that needs to be more standardized and universally accessed.

Aria (45:04)

Yes, thank you. I absolutely agree with that. I think civic education definitely ties in with lowering the voting age to 16, just because that would motivate more young people to get more involved civically, and motivate them to vote based on what they're passionate about. So thank you for that response. The final question is sort of related to a specific spectrum of civil rights or social justice, which is around housing. So as you know, Boston is known for being very expensive in terms of housing, especially being a college student and looking for housing that's relatively close to campus, or just being an individual in general that might have a historically marginalized community in terms of being low income and not being able to afford rent. The question is, what are your plans to lower the cost of housing and urban areas like Boston in order to make sure that they're more accessible to job opportunities or school or in general, just lowering the cost so that it's more accessible for all?

Ayanna Pressley (46:00)

Well, I am a supporter of rent stabilization, you know rent control, so let me just say that. But I also again, you know, all of these issues are interconnected. Okay. So you're not supposed to spend more than 30% of your income on rent. Most people are spending 60 to 80% of their income on rent. In fact, there was a study that showed that in Boston to afford one market rate rent one bedroom apartment, the average person would need to work 84 hours a week. So all these things are connected. We have to do the work of building more housing and lowering the costs. But if wages don't keep pace, or there are pay inequities- take black woman, for example, make 64 cents on the dollar to that of our white male counterparts. Or the fact that most people of color, women of color in particular, are low wage jobs. Massachusetts also has the second highest cost of childcare in the country. And then there are some 855,000 federal student loan borrowers in Massachusetts saddled with a minimum of \$32,000 worth of debt. You know, black students, and I was one of them. And 85% of us feel we have no choice but to take out loans to pursue higher education because of practices like redlining, which restricted our family's ability to build generational wealth. And then we're five times more likely to default on those loans than our white counterparts. So all these things are interconnected. So if we want to have something more affordable, I think we need a rent stabilization. We need zoning reform, we need to build more housing, housing that's truly affordable. A lot of those investments I fought for within the Build Back Better Act and my role in the Services Committee, which housing is under that umbrella. We have to make sure that people are working at a living wage. We have to cancel student debt. So instead of people paying all those loans, they can spend that money to purchase a home, to start a business. You know, black homeownership is the lowest today than

it's been in the last six decades. In my district, the Massachusetts 7th, which includes Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Randolph, Everett, Chelsea and Milton, in Cambridge to Roxbury- that's three miles- life expectancy drops by 30 years and median household income by \$50,000. The average wealth for a black Boston family is \$8 and for a white family, it's \$247,000. Now you've probably heard these statistics before, you might be tired of hearing it. Imagine how tired people are of living it. And so all these things are interconnected. And finally, I would just say, I'm a co-founder of the Future of Transportation Caucus and I introduced federal legislation with Senator Ed Markey, the Freedom to Move Act, which would treat public transit like the public good that it is and invest in it accordingly. I believe in the benefits of fair and free transit, you know, so all those things work together to make housing more affordable, and to make it possible for people to live in the city of Boston and to more than live, but to thrive. In the here and now though, I will just say that I'm going to be fighting in earnest for the bill for tenants, the Build Back Better Act to become law. My bill with Senator Booker, the Downpayment Towards Equity bill, which would provide \$220,000 in downpayment assistance for first generation home buyers is included in the Build Back Better Act. But the state, the future of that is currently uncertain. But this is a hill that I'm prepared to die on. Because housing is everything. It is a critical social determinant of health. It's critical to social economic mobility. And again, if you want to close the racial wealth gap, we've got to address the crisis of a lack of black home ownership. So all these issues are really interconnected.

Aria (49:53)

All right, thank you so much. That was all of our questions. I do want to personally say thank you so much for taking the time out of your day, your very, very busy schedule, to talk to Suffolk University. And personally, thank you for historically making a lot of change for Boston community, you know, being a black woman, and a black organizer in Boston and being raised here, you really have been such an inspiration to me and so many other folks. I just want to say thank you for being here, but also just thank you for your work entirely. We can definitely see it within our community. So we greatly appreciate you.

Ayanna Pressley (50:25)

Well, listen, I expect great things from all of you. And I hope that when you see me in the newspaper or on the news from time to time, you'll just say, just that you'll happily claim me vigorously and say that's my Congresswoman. It's the greatest, you know, honor of my life to fight for you and to represent you in this capacity. And I hope that you do not see this as a one

off that you will engage me and my office as a resource, or a coconspirator in all the good work that you're doing. And of course, we do have paid internships, both here in Boston and also in Washington DC. Okay?

Aria (50:59)

Yes. Thank you again, so much. Have a great day.

Ayanna Pressley (51:03)

All right y'all. You're gonna be great.

Aria (51:50)

Thank you! Alrighty, folks, how do people feel? How are people feeling? Yeah, definitely. Any, any thoughts before we go into our little wrap up questions? Have any thoughts? Feelings? Yeah.

Unknown Speaker (51:28)

I guess living in Boston it feels ...(Unintelligible)... refreshing for someone to understand the foolishness that we deal with on a regular basis. So someone working towards our betterment, especially being a woman of color just feels good.

Aria (51:50)

Yes, I definitely agree being a woman of color and experiencing a lot of like you said, the foolishness that we have to experience on a regular basis. It's really nice to hear her understand that in terms of our identity, and really reflect that within her work. Yes.

Unknown Speaker (52:05)

I think it's just amazing to see the representation. We normally don't see a lot of women of color, and just the way she carries herself. The confidence. And she has, she's just very, very eloquent in the way that she speaks and conveys her ideas. It makes you feel like, you know, maybe you can also get there. And I think that's just so important for young people, for people of color for women of color, to, you know, have someone in office doing the work that they care about.

Aria (52:33)

Yes, I definitely agree. Representation matters, especially if you're doing the work already and you feel like where's this going? Having someone like her within that position really motivates you to continue. Thank you. Yes, I'll go right here and then to the back there.

Unknown Speaker (52:49)

It really felt motivational even though I'm not from this congressional district, I'm from Essex County, which is not really the best. I do feel motivated, per se, because I am a first generation American, is just motivating me to even run, like for my future endeavors and run for office to represent morals and be that change for equity.

Aria (53:14)

Yeah, definitely agree. Regardless of your identity, I feel like it's really great. Thank you for that. Appreciate it. And to the back. Yes.

Unknown Speaker (53:20)

...Unintelligible... especially when she mentioned all the groups and how it was touch upon, for example, with Hispanics immigration. So I was like, wow, so much more, that we can really talk about and bring awareness to. It was very interesting the way she kind of expressed herself ...

Aria (53:47)

Yeah, I definitely felt the conversation vibe. It wasn't just her talking at us, like a lecture or anything. It was very conversational. And it did make you think. Thank you. Any other thoughts? Before we go into our specific questions? Yeah. Back and then front, yes?

Unknown Speaker (54:01)

I just think it's really nice to see someone in office that is holding a lot of identities, but also seeing the identities of others they don't necessarily hold. And that's just really uplifting and nice to see. Because it's that intersectionality, between different identities that we need to make positive change.

Aria (54:19)

Intersectionality is definitely important. I just love how she's an ally, for all and always is very inclusive in terms of her language, other than the identity she holds, thank you. Yes.

Unknown Speaker (54:27)

I originally grew up in like Randolph, all the things that when I grew up, I wasn't really, it wasn't really into like those type of things. But I was like, you know, here when you're in Boston, I feel like, this is really good sense of community. And there's really good push and I'm really hopeful that more things can actually be done, as you know, as a community.

Aria (54:47)

Absolutely. I think regardless of where you're from, and even if you're not even from the state, I think is really important, especially because you go to Suffolk, and you're in this community to really take the time and be a part of community organizing and take part and be a part of the change. Because we are right now we're young people, and we're at the forefront of it. So I definitely appreciate that. Thank you. We do have some wrap up questions. I feel like everyone pretty much answered them already. But if you wanted to add more, we can definitely do that based on the question. So maybe what struck you? That's the first question. Yeah, sure.

Unknown Speaker (55:24)

The part that struck me the most was that, when Ayanna was talking about her mother. On the resume, the "mother of Ayanna Pressley" which like struck me so much because I am the son of like immigrants, and I do represent a whole community. A whole community and my whole family too, but at the same time as a first generation American, so I really put my put my foot forward and lead this progress.

Aria (55:55)

Sure. Absolutely. The mentioning of her mom was definitely very moving, especially for me too, in a very similar circumstance. Any other thoughts for what struck you? Yeah.

Unknown Speaker (56:06)

I really liked her respect for young people. You definitely get the sense from some politicians that they don't really like the impact that we can have. But I think especially like in a college, in a community that there's so many colleges and so many young people active in local politics is important to have representatives who are responsive to how dedicated the youth are.

Gloria (56:38)

Yeah, we have a response in the chat here saying hearing her speak about her journey and work to fight all the issues I'm passionate about really was so inspiring and powerful. Yes. Thank you, Lauren, for sharing that. Do we have anybody else that wants to share? Yes.

Unknown Speaker (56:56)

I just thought she was so well spoken. And like, I wish that I lived in this district, but I don't. But if I did, she would have my vote.

Gloria (57:02)

[Laughing] Yeah, she woulda got you. So we also have in the chat saying I love what she said about politicians honing on single issues to voters, and that she acknowledged intersectionality. Young voters could be disabled, black voters could also be LGBTQIA+. Yes, very true. Yes?

Unknown Speaker (57:24)

Like I want to go off, like the comment that was just made about single issues. And how she said, like, Asian and indigenous folks are often left out of the conversation. As part of that community. I've noticed that because I'm an organizer in my community, and more and near Boston. But I'm originally from Lynn, Massachusetts. And there's like a lot of, you know, Asian people that live there a lot of like South Asian and Southeast Asian people that live there, who don't get engaged by politicians. I've seen politicians- I've helped politicians even- organize events. But it'll be like specifically focused on Latinx people, because there's Latinx people there. And kind of big communities just get fully ignored because you know, they maybe don't go out to vote as much. But why don't they go out to vote? Because they've never been engaged to begin with. So I think her acknowledging that was really like good to hear, because I don't feel like a lot of people really acknowledge it. It's just something that like, people do, and just don't talk about.

Aria (58:16)

Yeah, thank you for sharing that. Yeah. Intersectionality is really important. And like you were saying, like, a lot of communities get ignored or just pushed to the side. So that politicians can focus on other things so that I understand that frustration. Do you have any other thoughts?

Unknown Speaker (58:37)

Like you said, ... [Unintelligible]... is very important. Like, that's why I love Ayana. She's just very human even if you don't relate to her at all, like you're not black and not a woman. And not part

of this, you're not part of that, you could still relate to cause she's so human. So she thinks of literally everybody and how anybody could benefit. And it's not just a one side, sided, beneficial, like only catering to black folks. We're just thinking of like, this is basic human needs and basic human rights. We all need to have easy accessible transportation. Our kids need to go to school. Pre-K is essential, but it's not accessible. So she's working towards getting that done. And just like you don't have to be anybody or anything. It matters to you because you have the same necessary needs. And so that's why I love her so much. She's very human. She's very, like, you know, I'm a person and I won't do struggles for basic needs- not even because I'm black, white, whatever. This is basic and I just don't have that ... [Unintelligible]... in my heart.

Unknown Speaker (59:36)

Yeah, I think that's really important to emphasize that you know, she's very human, very relatable. You know, often we have politicians and people in power that we cannot relate to. It doesn't even matter if they're white or black, but they just feel disconnected from their community. So it's really refreshing to see someone who just sees everyone as human. Any other thoughts? Okay, well, what do you think really inspired you today? Everything? Yeah, I agree. Or like any takeaways? We've covered a lot. Yes?

Unknown Speaker (1:00:16)

I think that she really highlighted the importance of getting involved because she said something along the lines of like for internship that was unpaid and now she holds the seat and that's super inspiring and empowering because like it's almost like this one internship you might have it like a big breakthrough even though it's something small.

Gloria (1:00:39)

Yeah, I think that's really important to see how things can change. Yes?

Unknown Speaker (1:00:46)

I feel like recently I've been lacking motivation and I don't know, ... [Unintelligible]... places I can go to make a difference and usually I love social work and getting involved and doing those things then like kind of just push it away. So this is just like I was like a wake-up call to like, okay, you can do this so many ways to help but...

Gloria (1:01:12)

Yeah, so it was a little bit of like a wake-up call for you, help you feel a little bit more hopeful.

Aria (1:01:21)

Any other thoughts? All right. All right. I just wanted to thank everyone who are- who's both in person or virtually for coming to this event and listening and being a part of the conversation. Thank you to all those who contributed anything in the chat or just listened honestly. Just being a part of the conversation and listening to her and being able to ask the questions was great. Thank you to Suffolk Votes for creating the questions, for planning this event, for doing a lot of the work around tech and everything. We greatly appreciate it. We would not be able to even have her on Zoom if it wasn't for Suffolk Votes. Thank you to CCE for the work that they do in the communities and doing these projects. And of course, Black Student Union- thank you so much for co-sponsoring this event with Suffolk Votes and CCE and everything. So, again, thank you so much. We hope you had a lot of takeaways. If you have any questions about anything feel free to walk up to us. I know it's in-between classes and trying to get back so we understand that too. But again, thank you all so much.

Gloria (1:02:27)

Yes, thank you so much and you can always come stop by the CCE anytime. Join Suffolk Votes, join BSU, Get involved on campus!