

LOCAL / REGIONAL

COMMENTARY: Why Stacey Abrams Is Important for Georgia and Our Democracy

By Ben Jealous

You know the old game, two truths and a lie? Here are two truths and a lie about Georgia and Stacey Abrams, who recently announced that she's running

for governor. Let's start with the lie. The big lie is that Donald Trump lost Georgia in 2020 because of illegal votes.

The big truth is that Stacey Abrams helped achieve not one, not two, but three legal statewide victories in Georgia for President Joe Biden and Senators Raphael Warnock and John Ossoff.

Another truth is that Brian Kemp was Georgia's vote suppressor-in-chief long before he became the governor. In every cycle, he manages to come up with new strategies that are even more aggressive than ones he used before. Like a comic book villain, Kemp does not grow weary in his evil-doing. He's always hatching a new plan more dastardly than the last one.

That's why we cannot take anything for granted, even though Abrams demonstrated last year how effectively she can mobilize voters. She has seen every anti-voting-rights trick in the book. Many of them were used against her when she ran for governor in 2018. Back then, Kemp was secretary of state and used the power of his office to shape election rules in his own favor. As Abrams said at the time, Kemp "won under the rules of the game, but the game was rigged against the voters of Georgia."

If we want Georgia to be safe for democracy, two things need to happen in the next 12 months. First, Congress must pass urgently needed voting rights legislation in time to go into effect by next fall. And second, everybody who

showed up and turned out in Georgia in 2020 has to show up and turn out again—every individual and every group.

I'm proud that the organization I lead, People For the American Way, was among those that Abrams credited with helping to achieve the historic victories of the past year. We're going to spend the next 11 months fighting to help her get elected. And we're asking everyone to join us in making the same level of commitment in Georgia that they made in 2020.

Because here's one more big truth. Stacey Abrams' campaign is not only important for Georgia. It's important for our democracy. It is easy to get discouraged by what's happening across the country, where politicians are passing laws to discourage voting and protect their own power. Right-wing activists who are angry that Donald Trump lost the election—who refuse to admit that he lost—are being put in positions with authority to oversee next year's elections. The very basis of our democracy is being undermined.

There's something profoundly important about Stacey Abrams demonstrating leadership at this moment. Abrams has always been guided by a fundamental faith that people can make the system work. That faith has been at the heart of her organizing. It inspired her 2018 race and her work to make Georgia's law fair for all voters.

Many people might be tempted to lose faith in democracy when they see elected officials abusing their power to make it harder for some people to vote—and to limit the ability of their votes to make a difference. Stacey Abrams knows what she is up against. And knowing all that, she still isn't giving up on our democracy. That's inspiring.

As governor, she will work tirelessly to make democracy, and Georgia, work for everyone. So let's get to work for her.

Chattanooga NAACP honors Patricia Shackelford-Gray with President's Award

By Camm Ashford

The Chattanooga-Hamilton County NAACP recently honored Patricia Shackelford-Gray with its prestigious President's Award.

The President's Award is presented to an individual within the local NAACP branch who has been a pillar of the organization for their individual sacrifice and overall impact, and "who has given unselfishly of themselves to the community for community service."

"I was shocked and excited," Shackelford-Gray said of the award—presented by the national president and CEO of the NAACP, attorney Derrick Johnson—during the civil rights organization's virtual 2021 Ruby Hurley Image Awards event.

A life member of the NAACP, Shackelford-Gray—affectionately called "Pat" by many and "Mama Pat" by others—is a pillar of the community in the city of Chattanooga. She is a woman who is held in high regards for her numerous behind-the-scenes selfless acts and for the generosity of her giving spirit, especially when working with youth.

Shackelford-Gray is a Silver Star and Life member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., Pi Omega Chapter; former board member of Ivy Rose Foundation, Inc. and Make-A-Wish Foundation; board member of First Things First; Life member of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives; director at large for the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Chattanooga Chapter and a member of Covenant Keepers Marriage Ministry and the Scenic City Women's Network.

Shackelford-Gray is a graduate and former executive board member of Leadership Chattanooga and an administrator for Sounds of Unity Mass Choir and Unity Performing Arts Foundation of Chattanooga. She is also the owner of Elite Events and Travel.

Additionally, Shackelford-Gray is a veteran with the Chattanooga Police Department, and was awarded Employee of the Year for Community Ser-



Patricia Shackelford-Gray, affectionately called "Pat" by many and "Mama Pat" by others, is a pillar of the community in the city of Chattanooga.

vice and Chief's Service Award. She currently serves as Police Information Center manager, the first African American female manager to head up this division.

Shackelford-Gray graduated from Brainerd High School and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

Aside from her love of learning and traveling, Shackelford-Gray values the time she has with family. She is a member of the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, where she serves on the Choir, Women and Youth Ministries. She not only contributes to her own church choir, but also sings with the Third Generation Gospel Singers of Chattanooga and other choirs throughout the area.

"I would describe the life I aim to live as thriving so that I may help others flourish, knowing it'll help in building up families, who build up communities, and ultimately this contributes in building up our city, my native hometown of Chattanooga," Shackelford-Gray explained.

Holding three master's degrees, UTC graduate steps onto career path

By Shawn Ryan

Over the past four years, Oluwakorede Ajumobi hasn't had much time for anything but hitting the books. Hitting them hard.

A native of Nigeria, he enrolled in the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Graduate School in 2017, earning a master's degree in mathematics in 2019.

Forging on without a break, he pursued a master's in data analytics, then decided to add one in business administration. He received both at commencement ceremonies last Friday.

"What someone told me a long time ago was, 'Don't think. Just do it,'" said Ajumobi, who goes by Korede (kor-eh-DAY).

Listening to the advice now used by Nike as a marketing tagline, he was chosen for an internship with Rollins, Inc., owner of Orkin pest control services whose founder, Gary W. Rollins, gave \$40 million in 2018 to the UTC College of Business, the largest private gift in school history.

The company's needs matched his skills, Ajumobi said, and he dived into projects filled with statistics, data analysis, math, predictive models and other research tools.

One project determined how many vehicles Orkin would need in the future based on how many employees the company would need and the demand for its pest control services.

In another, he mapped out new geographic areas ripe with potential customers by using GPS records and fuel usage data from Orkin vehicles.

Company officials were happy with new territory to explore, he said, "but they were actually more ecstatic about the fact that there was data they didn't know about."

"That was fun."

When the internship was over, he came away with more experience than just crunching numbers, he said.

"It was a very interesting lesson because I learned that it's not just the technical knowledge you have, but it's truly, deeply understanding the business itself, the people involved and how everything flows from the bottom to the top."

Now ready to step into a career,



Oluwakorede Ajumobi earned three master's degrees from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

job opportunities aren't a problem. Ajumobi already has been offered a position with Rollins in Atlanta and is interviewing for a job with McKee Foods—home of Little Debbie—in Ooltewah.

The amount of mentoring he received at UTC is a critical piece in his educational and career paths, Ajumobi said.

"And this cuts across from my supervisors to my advisors, to the lecturers, the professors," he said. "If those folks weren't in my life, I don't think I would have chosen the path I did."

Not everything in his life revolves around stats, business models and math, though. He recently began rock climbing and hiking to take away some of the stress.

"That kind of keeps me human, not just studying all the time, so I still have a bit of a life," Ajumobi said.

"I try to make sure I have a good social network, support network, because that goes a long way, especially with the stress of grad school. That's enough to break a person."

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OUR CEO

DeVan Curry is the founder and current director of ANCUR, Inc. He graduated from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga earning dual Bachelor of Science degrees in both Biology and Psychology. DeVan then advanced to Georgia State University earning his M.S. in Urban Policy Studies - Policy Analysis and Evaluation from the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies in Atlanta, GA. Some of his accomplishments include:



- Developing Disaster Preparedness training, policy, and exercises for U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

- Through ANCUR INC, DeVan gained nearly six figures in Payroll Protection Program loans for his clients from the SBA, with a 100% approval rate, during the COVID-19 Crisis in 2020

- He has assisted over 200 small businesses and startups throughout the Southeast to become successful and profitable, helping others to achieve their vision.

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