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Working Class Advocate Tamara Johnson-Shealey Sets Eyes on US Senate

ATLANTA, Georgia—May 20, 2020—Georgia native, Tamara Johnson-Shealey is a progressive Democrat who is fighting for economic, social and environmental justice. She is campaigning for Senator Kelly Loeffler’s seat to make some historical wrongs, she says, finally right.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the underlying and unresolved problems still facing the African American community both in Georgia and across the country. In Johnson-Shealey’s state, African Americans make up about 32 percent of the population, but among those diagnosed with COVID-19—the disease the virus causes—the community makes up roughly 56 percent. In Albany, Georgia, 150 miles south of Atlanta, the African American population accounts for 90 percent of deaths due to COVID-19.

Johnson-Shealey appeared unsurprised when presented with these statistics. “Who are the essential workers? Black people and immigrants. My community is suffering, many of us don’t have the luxury of staying home. The fact that Black people are dying at higher rates than whites highlights the injustices we still face.” She added, “Honestly, I’m frustrated like anyone else, but this unfair treatment isn’t new. I’m running to make sure these injustices end. When everyone is treated fairly, we all do well.”

A resolute progressive, Johnson-Shealey believes in a \$15 minimum wage, Medicare For All, investing in public education—including historically Black colleges and universities, criminal justice reform and climate justice. She also supports revitalizing rural communities and, uniquely, creating federal policy to address the needs of American descendants of slavery.

“I wanted to be honest with who I am as a Black person. To do that, I realized that reparations need to be at the top of my agenda along with healthcare, education and the minimum wage.” If elected to the Senate, Johnson-Shealey would not be alone in her support for reparations. Last year, H.R. 40, a bill that would have established a commission to investigate the issue, received support from Sen. Elizabeth Warren, Sen. Corey Booker, Julian Castro and Marianne Williamson.

No stranger to Georgia politics, Johnson-Shealey advocated for improved tax policies for business owners in the beauty and barber industry. She also advocated for improved industry health and safety standards. When related legislation stalled in the Georgia General Assembly, Johnson-Shealey says she realized that change needed to happen at the electoral level, so she ran for the Georgia State Senate District 40 seat, defeating Benedict I. Truman II in the 2014 Democratic primary.

Born to a teenage mother and raised in Chatham County, Georgia, Johnson-Shealey developed a determined spirit in the face of an imperfect early life. The candidate got her start as an entrepreneur, working for 18 years as a nail technician and owning a nail salon for 10 years. This year, Johnson-Shealey completed her Juris Master's Degree from Emory University Law School and was an intern at the Public Health Law Program at the Centers for Disease and Control. She co-hosts a weekly digital broadcast titled, "Tamara For Georgia", where she discusses a broad range of issues relevant to Georgia voters.

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