



NAILAH AMARU

Advocacy and Policy
Strategist



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NA'ILAH AMARU

**A Woman of Choice, Composure,
and Courageous Character**

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Meet the woman of the hour, **Na'ilah Amaru**. An **Advocacy and Policy Strategist** who has seamlessly navigated the broad political landscape from local neighborhoods to City Hall and Capitol Hill. With a wealth of experience of 20 years, she has largely served within Democratic politics in both liberal and conservative states.

Na'ilah has extensive knowledge about how to effectively transform ideas into action, and action into policy — specifically in the areas of *community engagement, issue campaigns, government relations, coalition-building, civic leadership training and consulting, and program evaluation.*

Over the last two decades, Na'ilah's career has spanned nearly every aspect of the advocacy spectrum but always focused on empowering underserved communities through civic engagement and public policy. Her unconventional journey is a true example of setting goals and accomplishing them with confidence, competence, and constant hard work.

Advanced Education Qualifications

Na'ilah earned her master's in public administration with a concentration in policy analysis from the University of Texas San Antonio; a Master of Public Policy with a concentration in non-profit management from Georgia State University and a Master of Science in Urban Affairs with a concentration in urban planning at Hunter College. ; and both a BA in political science and a BS in criminal justice from the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Distinguished Military Service

Na'ilah joined the U.S. Army three days after high school graduation and when she returned to civilian life, she embarked on a career that centered on public policy as a tool for creating social change.

She is an Army veteran and ammunition specialist with distinguished service in Iraq. She was the lowest-ranking soldier and only woman to receive her battalion's Soldier of the Month recognition, and also was awarded an Army Commendation medal for exemplary service.

The Turning Point

Na'ilah's advocacy journey began when she learned the consequences of not having any power. Being invisible was



a driving force to take her first steps into advocacy. When she left active duty military service, her new mission was to create and expand opportunities for grassroots governance by using public policy as a primary tool to effect positive social change for underserved communities.

Unifying Interests, Building Coalitions, and Aligning Agendas

From City Hall to the Beltway, Na'ilah's extensive political background has built her reputation as a diligent self-starter with a successful track record in organizational and campaign management.

Within her first two months as executive director of the New York City Council Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus, Na'ilah redefined the role by coalescing 26 council members around one unified agenda and adeptly balancing competing interests with shared legislative priorities.

Na'ilah has served as a legislative aide to U.S. Congressman John Lewis and policy advisor to former Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed. In her long-standing career, she has also worked as a grassroots organizer, direct-service non-profit manager, mayoral policy advisor, Capitol Hill staffer, non-profit consultant, government executive, and public interest lobbyist, among other positions. Across each role, she has spearheaded crafting public policy, political agendas, campaign strategies, and messaging at the city, state, and federal levels.

Leadership is more than just its Name

Na'ilah quotes, "Leadership is not found in a title. Anyone can be a leader at any point in their career, and it's up to us to find or create opportunities for us to make an impact in whatever space we're in."

Driven by her mission and diverse network, she offers a vast interdisciplinary background with expertise in many



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key areas. She uses her platform to strengthen engagement between communities and their government officials while keeping the constituents they serve at the forefront of legislative conversations.

Working with intense curiosity, relentless tenacity, and a deep personal commitment to civic leadership and community engagement, Na'ilah builds bridges between government, non-profits, and everyday people.

In roles including grassroots organizer in Georgia, a legislative staffer on Capitol Hill, and managing NYC's largest political caucus, Na'ilah deeply understands how to maneuver an ever-changing political landscape, build consensus, and transform ideas into public policy.

Through a combination of political acumen and military discipline derived from distinguished service as an ammunition specialist in the US Army, Na'ilah has earned a reputation as a disciplined tactician with a well-honed ability to navigate shifting political landscapes while driving forward organizational and campaign goals.

Acing all her Roles and Responsibilities

Na'ilah is a contributor to the award-winning Brown Girls Guide to Politics podcast and blog, serves on the Democratic National Committee's Young Professional Leadership Council, board member of Citizen Action New York, and is Lead National Trainer for Vote Run Lead, changing the face of political leadership by training women to run for public office - and win. She is also a frequent media commentator, panelist, and keynote speaker on politics, racial and gender justice, and civic engagement.

A Book to define Na'ilah's Life Journey

When asked, if there will be a book written on her life journey and what will she name it, Na'ilah with compassion stated, her biography would be named Combat Boots and Pearls!

Elaborating on the name of the book, she stated, she has the rough and tumble grit of a soldier, and pearls because she has learned many lessons in her journey – plus, her fashion trademark is wearing a classic string of pearls.

Also, her experiences in the Army have prepared her in many ways for the battlefield of advocacy, and she understood the importance of the pearls of wisdom we all learn along our respective journeys.

Education is the way to Excellence

Each of Na'ilah's graduate degrees has helped inform her work and deepen her understanding of her field.

Her Master's in Public Administration helped her understand how to effectively manage government and non-profit organizations. Her Master's of Public Policy helped her understand through political philosophy and quantitative analysis, how policies are developed, implemented, and evaluated. Her Master's in Urban Planning helped her understand the impact of land use decisions in creating the political, social, and economic geography of cities.

Experiences are the Foundation for Entrepreneurship

Na'ilah's personal life experiences have influenced the entrepreneur in her by helping her adopt the key characteristics of a successful entrepreneur. For example, she is not afraid to fail, she employs critical thinking, and she has clarity of vision.

She doesn't let the fear of failure prevent her from making strategic or tactical decisions. Na'ilah believes that *if we stay within our comfort zones then we never innovate and think (or push) beyond what we think is possible.*

Also, critical thinking is key to her work as she is constantly interpreting different points of information and assessing what information most impacts her work.

And lastly, Na'ilah is fierce and has a clear vision of what she is building, with whom she is building it, and why. With such clarity and focus, she can make better-informed decisions about how she moves in advocacy spaces.

An Advice to the Younger Self

"Believe in yourself."

Na'ilah recently explained to a mentee that she spent a great deal of her career hiding behind her credentials and experiences. As a woman of color navigating male-dominated spaces from the military to the political sphere, unless people knew her resume, there was always a question of her qualifications. Every time she stepped into a room, she had to validate why she was there.

Na'ilah fondly states she wished back then someone told her she was enough, she didn't need multiple advanced degrees

to prove that she was competent or that she didn't need experience ranging from the grassroots to Capitol Hill to prove that she deserved to occupy political spaces.

She made those decisions because she knew her accomplishments and credentials had to be on point to be taken seriously.

"For women of color, every day we navigate a society that tells us we are not enough. In those moments of uncertainty and self-doubt, know that your skills and expertise have prepared you to succeed. Also understand, your worth is not rooted in any job title or salary, but rather in recognizing your own value without condition. Regardless of degrees, certificates, or awards, know that you are enough," concludes Na'ilah.

Conquering the Challenge

When Na'ilah first began her career, a key challenge she faced was that she did not look like many people in the rooms who were leading policy conversations and making legislative and budget decisions.

As such, her presence and expertise were often overlooked. However, with time, she understood that her insightful experience provided a unique perspective that was often missing. That's when she realized her voice could make a difference.

Informing and Empowering Next-Generation Leaders

Being a member of the Democratic National Committee's Young Professional Leadership Council, Na'ilah connects and engages millennial voters with the Democratic Party through voter registration, political engagement, and fundraising.

Na'ilah also develops and facilitates workshops to support individuals to take on leadership roles in their communities. She delivers training materials designed to cultivate effective community leaders with the expertise to address the community as well as societal issues so that they are empowered to make a positive impact within their communities. She also is a consultant on issue campaigns and works with advocacy groups on their political strategies.

Advocating for Greater Civic Engagement

Whether at the grassroots or national level, Na'ilah passionately advocates for everyday people to step into their full power and potential by pursuing various leadership and

organizing roles in their communities, as well as the non-profit and public sectors. Her commitment and compassion for the community is a symbol of true leadership. By governing her rights and powers most effectively, she envisions a future where everyone thrives.

Presently she is working with local community groups, educating and mobilizing constituents to engage in various tactics aimed at bringing voting reforms to New York. Na'ilah is also leading a racial equity and gender justice campaign called #JustPay which fights to end poverty wages for human services workers, a majority of whom are women and people of color.

Empowering Women in Leadership

Na'ilah is a vocal proponent of women claiming their place as political and social power brokers with the capacity to lead communities and create change.



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She was also a key founding member of the New York Organizing Committee to develop a new chapter of Emerge America, an advocacy group that recruits and trains women to run for Democratic office. She also travels across the country and serves as a national trainer with Vote Run Lead, the nation's largest and most diverse training program for women to run for public office and win.

Being a contributor to Brown Girls Guide, she shares hard-earned lessons from her journey with young women of color who are interested in entering politics with a purpose.

Adaptation of the Post-Pandemic Advocacy Change

During the pandemic, traditional tried and true tactics of advocacy such as face-to-face interactions, ad hoc hallway conversations, and informal coffees were no longer options. Effective advocacy tactics have changed in that they will most likely be hybrid moving

forward as digital technology is incorporated into long-term strategies.

However, it is important to note that virtual tools can exclude and marginalize community voices due to limitations in access to technology. Advocates are still trying to find the balance between in-person mobilization and Zoom rooms to engage government decision-makers and everyday people. However, there are many tools in the advocacy toolbox, and advocates will discover the most effective combination of digital and traditional advocacy.

A Purpose-Driven Future

Serving a purpose and fulfilling her passion, Na'ilah plans to continue using policy and advocacy as a tool to build communities. She looks forward to using her skills and expertise to create spaces at the intersections of politics, people, and policy to serve the needs of marginalized communities.

