

Mason's impact flourishes with alumni legislators in Richmond

February 15, 2024 / By Roddena I. Kirksey

The legislative session is underway in Virginia's General Assembly. George Mason University's presence continues to make an impact in Richmond, with an increased number of proud Mason Patriots serving the commonwealth.

Mason's General Assembly alumni include Majority Leader Delegate Charniele Herring (D-4), BA Economics '93; Senators Jeremy McPike (D-29), BA Government and Politics '97 MPA '06; Stella Pekarsky (D-36), BA Government and Politics '00, MEd '03; Bryce Reeves (R-28), MPA '99; Saddam Salim (D-37), BS Public Administration '12, MPH '15; and Glen Sturtevant (R-12), JD '06; and Delegates Michael J. Webert (R-61), BA Communications '10; and Bill Wiley (R-32), BS Economics '93, MEd '98.

Here is the first in an occasional series spotlighting Mason alumni in the legislature:



Charniele Herring. Photo provided

Majority Leader Delegate Charniele Herring

Majority Leader Delegate Charniele Herring exemplifies the alumni motto: *Once a Patriot, Always a Patriot*. She welcomed students at Mason Lobbies, served as the Winter 2020 Commencement speaker, and hosted ceremonies for President Gregory Washington's investiture. She also volunteers as a member of the Schar Gender and Policy Advisory Board and University Life Advisory Board.

"George Mason is unlike other universities," Herring said. "We pride ourselves on the number of people accepted, not the number excluded. Mason pride runs throughout Virginia because of the love and dedication of its alumni. The university continues to fulfill its mission of inclusivity and preparing the next generation of leaders, in science, politics, education, and so much more. That's why I'm proud to call myself a Mason alumna."

One of Herring's priorities this session is expanding broadband internet infrastructure. "Closing the digital divide would expand economic and educational opportunities to disadvantaged communities across Virginia."

Herring takes pride in being a voice for her constituents. "I am an advocate for women's rights, voting rights, and looking out for our most

vulnerable populations. I'm lucky to be able to have the support of the communities in my district and be an advocate for their interests.”

She urges students to pursue their passion. “If you are passionate about what you do, success will follow. Make a plan, look for and experience opportunities, and do your best to enact change in the world around you.”



Glen Sturtevant. Photo provided

Senator Glen Sturtevant

Senator Glen Sturtevant’s journey to Capitol Square was nurtured at Mason. While pursuing his law degree, he worked to protect citizens by prosecuting crimes in the local Commonwealth Attorney’s Office. After his Mason years, he was elected as a member of the Richmond School Board advocating for students and their families. A commitment to public service is at the core of Sturtevant’s legislative work.

His agenda for this session includes empowering parents in educational decisions, reducing taxes, supporting law enforcement, promoting employment opportunities, and ensuring that veterans receive their benefits.

True to his beginnings, Sturtevant challenges students to lean into service. “Advocate for your community, engage in the civic process, and embrace Mason’s spirit of innovation.”



Saddem Salim. Photo provided

Senator Saddam Salim

Senator Saddam Salim is the latest alumnus to join the green and gold contingent in Richmond.

Salim won his Senate seat in the recent 2023 election. His district encompasses the City of Fairfax and Mason’s Fairfax Campus, Falls Church City, and parts of Fairfax County.

“I’m a proud George Mason alumnus and honored to serve in the Senate of Virginia. This milestone underscores the exceptional quality of the education I received at Mason,” said Salim.

His Mason experience paved the way for his career. He’s a senior consultant providing financial advice to federal clients at 11th Hour Service. He previously worked at PenFed Credit Union, Kearney and Company, and the United States Institute of Peace.

His journey as a first-generation Bangladeshi immigrant adapting to life in America informs his views on issues everyday Virginians encounter. When his family settled in Northern Virginia, they endured unexpected hardships—homelessness, economic hardship, and a health care crisis. However, they overcame those barriers with the assistance of community organizations and government programs.

Salim has a history of advocating for the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the political process. Before his Senate run, Salim was active in local politics, where he was the founding member of the Fairfax County Democratic Committee’s Asian and Pacific Islander and Black Caucuses. His advocacy propelled him into public service.

“People like me were not adequately represented in public office. I felt a responsibility to step forward and be a voice for everyday people facing various challenges,” he said. In the current General Assembly session, he is championing legislation addressing affordable housing, public safety, and the overall well-being of all Virginians.

Similar to Herring, Salim encourages Mason students to “always pursue your dreams. Take advantage of opportunities in academics, extracurricular activities, or community engagement. By following your dreams and staying committed to your goals, you can make a meaningful impact on your life and the lives of those around you.”