

Our politics are our deepest
form of expression: they
mirror our past experiences
and reflect our dreams and
aspirations for the future.

*Senator Paul Wellstone
(1944-2002)*

WE ARE WHO WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR

I write to you this week with a message from one of the more recent additions to the Starcross community. Emily Sylvestre is a 24-year-old Intern here and in addition to picking apples and harvesting olives, she has been helping me write for the past few months. She is from Minnesota and shared with me her excitement about a certain newly elected congresswoman from her district. It has brought me hope and healing in the last week, and I hope she will do the same for you. First, a word from Emily.



I was born in South Minneapolis in the early '90s, at a time of huge shifts in my home city. My family has lived in Minnesota for generations, and in that time the demographics of the state had remained unchanged: mostly white. In the '80s this began to evolve, and since 1990, the non-white populations in Minnesota have tripled, sometimes even quadrupled.

Many factors came together to mean that my frigid home-state now has the most refugees per capita of any state in the country. Perhaps initially drawn by strong social programs available for immigrants and refugees, still more people have joined family members and friends already living in the state. At the same time, job opportunities led to an dramatic increase in the Latinx population. I attended Minneapolis public schools with children born in Somalia, Laos, Mexico, Burma (now Myanmar), El Salvador, and Ecuador among other places. The traditions, languages and cuisine of these immigrants as well as the institutions they've created have transformed Minnesota in many ways, particularly the Twin Cities.



This transformation has been complicated and rocky. Minneapolis and St. Paul remain [deeply segregated](#) cities, and distrust of outsiders has often led to hostility and violence. For many, the road to belonging has been marked by injustice and racism. This ugliness too, has transformed my state.

My experience growing up in Minneapolis was very different than my father's and his father's before him. I started to learn Spanish when I was 5, grew up loving the Mexican, Vietnamese and Ethiopian restaurants by my house, and heard first-hand stories from classmates who had already lived through greater horrors than I will ever know. I have personally been transformed by the immigrants who chose to come to Minnesota. I am a better person because of it, and I believe that my state is as well.



This midterm election, I had the privilege of voting for Ilhan Omar (1981-) in Minnesota's 5th District. Born in Somalia, her family fled to a refugee camp in Kenya after the start of the civil war. Four years later she started high school six miles from my childhood home. She learned English in three months and began a lifelong passion for politics translating for her grandfather at local Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party caucuses at the age of 14. She will be the first refugee to serve in Congress and she won with a landslide 78% of the vote.

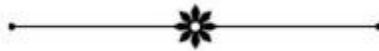
When she first arrived in Minneapolis in the '90s, this political direction was by no means inevitable. At the turn of the century Minnesota was heralded by the GOP as a battleground state. The tragic death of the beloved and unifying Senator Paul Wellstone (1944–2002), could have devastated the historically populist Democratic–Farmer–Labor Party. I have vivid memories of this loss – heartbroken crowds and candlelit vigils. Politics in Minnesota could very easily resemble Wisconsin's today.

The groundwork for Ilhan Omar's success, and the success of progressives across the board in the last two years, was laid by [decades of grassroots organizing](#), political engagement, and community participation. Much of this work was done by unacknowledged activists and change-makers, many of them immigrants or children of immigrants themselves.

In the words of Senator Wellstone, a great hero of mine:

Politics is not predictions and politics is not observations. Politics is what we do. Politics is what we do, politics is what we create, by what we work for, by what we hope for and what we dare to imagine.

Creating the future that we want must be a creative process. What inspires me so about Ilhan Omar is that she is not only interested in opposing. She rejects cynicism. She has a vision for a better world. This statement, released after her victory, made this vision materialize before my eyes:



Thank you so much for choosing me to be your next Representative in Congress.

People will talk about the many firsts behind my name.

The first woman of color to serve Minnesota in Congress.

The first woman to wear a hijab to be elected to Congress.

The first refugee to be elected to Congress.

One of the first Muslim women to be elected to Congress. A title I share with my beautiful sister in Michigan, Rashida Tlaib.

But I never ran to be a first. I ran because when I came to this country, I had heard of its promise.

But when I look around this district I see too many people who have never known the

bounty of the American promise. The promise of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This is supposed to be a land where people have the tools they need to lead lives that are prosperous and yet;

Indigenous people, promised homes, are living in tents like refugees on their own land.

Immigrants, promised a land of opportunity, are too often met with bigotry and hate.

Millennials, promised the American dream if they study hard enough, only to find that dream deferred by the harsh realities of our economy.

I could not stand on the sidelines and watch those promises go unkept. My grandfather taught me that when you see injustice, you fight back. You do not give in to sorrow, you do not give into sadness, you organize. You build with people.

I would not be here without my people: my family, my father, my children Isra, Adnan, Ilwad and my husband, my best friend, my rock – Ahmed.

And my other family, my campaign team – staff, interns and volunteers – who have given endlessly of themselves and their time these past few months.

And I wouldn't be here without the people of the Fifth Congressional District, who, in electing me, have said that we will fight.

For our bold, progressive vision.

For working families to ensure that they are paid a living wage and have access to safe and sick time, thanks in large part to labor unions who have our backs.

For healthcare for all.

We will fight for world-class education, tuition-free college and finally free students from the shackles of debt.

We will fight to abolish ICE and protect refugees, protect women's rights and LGBTQ rights.

And we will fight to use the sanity of science to protect our environment and fight for climate change.

You, as Minnesotans, are the the North Star that guides our nation. You don't back down.

You become your own promise.

When the call came to run for Congress, I had to answer. Because this time demanded it. A time when racism and white supremacy threaten our very existence. When my status as an immigrant, Black, Muslim woman means that the current administration doesn't see me as

an American.

You know I will not bow down to the hate. I will not back down in fear.

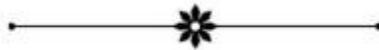
I will stand strong with you, as we fight to protect our immigrant families and neighbors, our children, our planet and our communities. That is my promise to you.

Our state is cold, but the people here have warm hearts. It has always made me feel like I'm part of the family because Minnesotans know, we don't just welcome immigrants to our state, we send them to Washington.

Our beautiful journey does not end tonight. We must stand side by side and fight for our democracy. We must fight for our rights and the freedoms we value.

It is up to us to fulfill the promise of America. We must do this work to create the America we believe in. The America we deserve.

We are who we have been waiting for.



With women like Congresswoman-Elect Ilhan Omar and Emily Sylvestre in our future, there is definitely hope for our country!

Brother Toby