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L to R: Anu Banerjee, Uma Pulendran, Vyanti Joseph, Stacey Abrams, Suresh Kolichala, Viju Rao, and Anjali Enjeti. Photo courtesy: Nancy Helene.

BY ANJALI ENJETI



organization for South Asian Democrats working to flip seats blue.

They See Blue was originally started in the Bay Area in August 2018 by a group of South Asian Democrats working to flip congressional seats in California. The **Georgia chapter** was born a year later, in August 2019, and now has over 200 members. The chapter includes Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, and Indo-Caribbeans, who hold multiple faiths, including Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikh, and Jain, as well as nonbelievers. Anu Banerjee, Anjali Enjeti, Vyanti Joseph, Suresh Kolichala, Uma Pulendran, and Viju Rao, make up the core team. Many members are either immigrants or the first generation born in the U.S. – people with a short voting history.

Feroza Syed, a They See Blue Georgia member and trans activist, emceed the event.



L to R: State Senator Sheikh Rahman, emcee Feroza Syed, U.S. Senate candidates Sarah Riggs Amico, Mayor Teresa Tomlinson, and Jon Ossoff. Photo courtesy: Nancy Helene.

The keynote speaker was Stacey Abrams, former Georgia Minority Leader and Founder and Chair of Fair Fight, a voting rights nonprofit. Leader Abrams emphasized the necessity of building coalitions across diverse communities, including the South Asian community, and getting out the vote. “We can change what happens in 2020,” she said. “We can show up.”

Next, the three Georgia Democratic candidates running against U.S. Senator David Perdue in 2020 – former Columbus Mayor Teresa Tomlinson, 2018 Lieutenant Governor Candidate Sarah Riggs Amico, and 2017 Congressional Candidate Jon Ossoff – spoke about why they are running for office and their goals, should they win the primary on May 19, 2020.

Finally, Georgia State Senator Sheikh Rahman closed the program. Rahman is not only the first Muslim and first Bangladeshi elected to the Georgia Legislature, he is also the first South Asian and the first immigrant elected to the State Senate. Rahman championed the diversity of his district, District 5 in Gwinnett County, but discussed his concerns that minorities, including South Asians, are not exercising their right to vote. Emphasizing how one vote can make all the difference, Rahman shared, “when I got elected to the Democratic National Committee, I won by one single vote.” He closed with an emotional plea that brought attendees to their feet. “We can make a change. We can make a difference. Do your civic duty. Come out and vote.”



The 2017 sixth district special congressional election in Georgia, where Democratic candidate Jon Ossoff challenged Republican candidate Karen Handel, as well as Leader Abrams' 2018 candidacy for governor, **galvanized the progressive South Asian community**. South Asian American Democrats' engagement during these two elections planted the seed for what would eventually become the Georgia chapter of They See Blue.

"We felt the need for a Democratic organization for South Asians to come together to provide a structure to our political activism," said Kolichala, who immigrated to the U.S. from India 15 years ago. "We also wanted to provide a platform to contribute positively to preserve the American strengths of diversity and inclusion."

Past Georgia chapter meetings have focused on voting rights, municipal elections, and the state legislative session. For 2020, the group will concentrate on registering voters in the South Asian American community, and work to elect Democratic candidates at the state and federal level. (They See Blue Georgia does not endorse Democratic candidates until after the primaries.) Kolichala feels that South Asian Democratic engagement is the key to flipping Georgia blue. "This isn't the country I once admired and fell in love with," he said. "We need to do something."

Over one third of the South Asian population in the United States lives in the South and increasingly, South Asians are voting Democrat. Seventy-eight percent of Asian American and Pacific Islanders voted for Stacey Abrams for governor in 2018, and a sizable number of these voters were South Asian Americans. Despite this, many voters keep their political leanings quiet because they live in a red state. This is where They See Blue Georgia comes in. "We empower South Asian Democrats to get vocal about their politics," said Kolichala.

Upcoming events for They See Blue Georgia include meet and greets with state, congressional, and senate candidates, as well as voter registration drives. There are no membership fees. For more information on how to join, email tsb.georgia@gmail.com, follow the group on Twitter (@theyseebluega), request to join the Facebook group (theyseebluega), or follow the Instagram account (theyseebluegeorgia).