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Bakari Sellers named 2018 annual MLK Celebration speaker

JANUARY 2, 2018

Civil rights activist, attorney and political commentator Bakari Sellers has been named the Georgia Southern University annual MLK Celebration speaker and will present on Wednesday, Jan. 24, at 7 p.m. in the Performing Arts Center at 847 Plant Drive in Statesboro. The live presentation will be simulcast at the Georgia Southern Armstrong Campus in Savannah.

April 2018 will mark 50 years since King's assassination, and as such, will be an important theme in Sellers's presentation. Sellers will present on activism in reflection of King's legacy.

Sellers made history in 2006 when, at the age of 22, he defeated a 26-year incumbent state representative in South Carolina. His win made him the youngest member of the state's legislature and the youngest African-American elected official in the entire nation.

He won the 2014 Democratic nomination for Lt. Governor in South Carolina, and served on former President Barack Obama's South Carolina steering committee during the 2008 election. Sellers has received numerous accolades including being named *TIME* Magazine's "40 Under 40" in 2010 and being ranked in "The Root 100" list of the nation's most influential African-Americans in 2014.

Sellers has served as a featured speaker at events for the National Education Association, College Democrats of America National Convention, NAACP, the 2008 Democratic National Convention, and he delivered the opening keynote address to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., in 2007.

Sellers practices law with the Strom Law Firm LLC in Columbia, South Carolina, and is a CNN contributor. He is married to Ellen Rucker.

Each year, Georgia Southern's MLK Celebration provides an opportunity for the campus and community to gather and celebrate the life and legacy of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The presentation will be simulcast live at the Ogeechee Theater on the Armstrong Campus. Free transportation to the Georgia Southern Statesboro Campus will be provided for students on the Armstrong Campus. Contact Lucera Aradillas in the Office of Multicultural Affairs at lucero.aradillas@armstrong.edu to register for transportation.

The MLK Celebration Speaker is sponsored annually by the Office of the Vice President of Enrollment, Office of Vice President of Student Affairs, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs. For more information on the MLK Celebration, visit GeorgiaSouthern.edu/msc/mlk.



Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/Research institution founded in 1906, offers 142 degree programs serving more than 27,000 students through nine colleges on three campuses in Savannah, Statesboro, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities.

Visit

Student Government Association presidents build ties across campuses

JANUARY 2, 2018

When students Dylan John and Nipuna Ambanpola met, they never imagined they would form a partnership as Student Government Association (SGA) presidents of the same university in the United States a few years later.

Despite attending rival high schools in Sri Lanka, the two are excited about the partnership they've formed to build a unified and strong student body across three campuses and the strides they are making to help other international students gain educational opportunities in America as they have had.

John and Ambanpola often joke of their continued friendly high school rivalry when they arrived in America and began attending different universities. John received the Georgia Rotary Student Program scholarship in 2011 and came to Statesboro to pursue his education, and in 2015, Ambanpola came to Savannah on the same scholarship.

While John had been SGA president at Georgia Southern University for two terms, Ambanpola had just been elected president of the Armstrong SGA at the start of the consolidation process.

"When consolidation was first announced, nobody knew all the answers," said John. "We just needed everyone to shine a little bit of *their* light to help the process so we could navigate toward the ultimate light. We all had our own perceptions of what the institution should be.

"During this consolidation process, everything was very intentional," he continued. "We made sure students were the predominant group we were serving and serving well."

John and Ambanpola worked closely together in the following months, both having very open discussions with the students at both institutions. Their combined passion for creating a student body that would represent both Georgia Southern and Armstrong traditions took center stage in their many forums and town hall meetings surrounding the consolidation process.

"Some Georgia Southern students started at Armstrong and transferred here," said John. "Some have sisters, best friends, cousins on that campus. We really are like one family in two locations, and now we're coming together as one."



Nipuna Ambanpola (left) and Dylan John (middle) met with Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, Robert Hilton, in December to discuss educational opportunities for Sri Lankan students in America.

This December, John and Ambanpola visited their hometowns in Sri Lanka and met with Robert Hilton, deputy chief of mission of the U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka. They discussed their efforts throughout the consolidation, presented a Georgia Southern pennant to Hilton, and took the opportunity to discuss Georgia Southern as a preferred education destination for Sri Lankan and international students. They used their own stories of being two international students afforded an opportunity to lead students during such a critical period for the institution as an example of how beneficial this experience has been and can be for other students.

Both John and Ambanpola will finish out their presidency terms through May 2018, at which time one president will be elected to represent the University and its three campuses from that point on. In the next election, students will vote for the SGA president as well as two executive vice presidents who will represent each campus.

"I love the culture and our close-knit communities," said Ambanpola. "This makes it possible for us to feel like part of a family."

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