LAPHONZA BUTLER

b. May 11, 1979

FIRST OUT BLACK U.S. SENATOR

"Our strength lies in our unity. When we stand together, we are unstoppable."

She is the first out Black U.S. senator.

Laphonza Romantique Butler is a former community activist, union organizer, and political strategist. In 2023 she became the first Black openly LGBTQ member of the United States Senate.

Butler was born and raised in Magnolia, Mississippi. Her father died of heart disease when she was 16. Her mother worked multiple jobs to keep the family afloat. Butler graduated salutatorian from public high school in 1997 and earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Jackson State University in 2001.

After college, Butler became a union organizer for nurses, janitors, and hospital workers along the East Coast and Midwest. She moved to California in 2009, where she held top positions at the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), before assuming the role of president of SEIU Local 15 at the age of 30. SEIU Local 15 is the largest union in California and the largest union of long-term-care employees in the nation. She served as its president for more than a decade.

In 2018 Jerry Brown, then governor of California, appointed Butler to the University of California Board of Regents. In this role, Butler collaborated on university decisions governing subjects such as tuition, admissions, and employee and land management.

In 2019 Butler became a partner at SCRB Strategies, a communications firm dealing with complex corporate issues and political campaigns. Among other high-profile clients, she worked with Kamala Harris on her 2020 presidential bid and with the rideshare app Uber, advising them on the classification of their drivers as employees. Butler left SCRB to serve as the director of North American public policy for Airbnb.

In 2021 Butler was named the first Black president of EMILY's List, the country's largest political action committee aimed at electing Democratic women who support abortion rights. The following year, Butler joined the board of directors for Vision to Learn, an organization providing optometry services to low-income children.

In October 2023, Governor Gavin Newsom of California selected Butler to fill the vacant Senate seat previously held by the late Dianne Feinstein. The appointment made Butler the first Black LGBTQ U.S. Senator. Butler serves on the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. She fights for equality, reproductive rights, labor rights, gun reform, affordable housing, and other progressive issues.

Butler identifies as a lesbian and is married to Neneki Lee. They have one daughter together and share homes in California and Maryland.



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