Jahana Hayes
By Owen Fletcher

Did you know Jahana Hayes was the first African-American ever nominated to Congress by Democrats in Connecticut? The path there wasn’t easy, though.

Jahana Hayes was born on March 8th, 1973. As a child, Jahanna grew up in Berkeley Heights public housing with her grandmother in Waterbury. She had little money. Her mom was a drug addict, so Jahanna rarely saw her. Jahana gave birth at the age of 17. Jahanna knows from experience how people in low income communities struggle.

Jahana Hayes decided to turn her life around. She enrolled in Naugatuck Community College and continued with her education. She then got her four year degree at Southern Connecticut State University. Finally, she got her masters degree and advanced degree from Saint Joseph College and the University of Bridgeport. Once she got through school, Jahanna became a Social Studies teacher at John F. Kennedy High School in Waterbury. She started an after school club called H.O.P.E, which stands for Helping Out People Everywhere. The students in the club started a Relay For Life team and raised $20,000 under her supervision. The club also painted porches and planted flowers at houses in rough neighborhoods. She now serves as the Talent and Professional Development supervisor for Waterbury Public Schools. Jahanna also won the 2016 National Teacher of the Year Award.

After her career in education, Jahanna decided to take part in politics. As stated before, Jahana Hayes was the first African-American woman to be in Congress from Connecticut. She was encouraged to run by Senator Chris Murphy. She won election into Congress over Republican Manny Santos, the former mayor of Meriden. Jahana now lives with her husband, Milford, and their four children in Wolcott, CT.