

Jason Altmire ([00:05](#)):

Hello and welcome to another edition of Career Education Report. I'm Jason Altmire, and today we have a treat because we have Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett. She is a freshman Democrat from the Dallas area who has made a name for herself very quickly on Capitol Hill and in Washington as a leading progressive voice, but also a leading voice for proprietary career schools. I can think of many champions that we have, Republicans and Democrats. I cannot think of anyone who is more of a champion than Congresswoman Crockett. She has made a name for herself very quickly. So Congresswoman Crockett, thank you very much for being with us.

Rep. Jasmine Crockett ([00:47](#)):

Thank you so much for having me. I look forward to the conversation.

Jason Altmire ([00:50](#)):

I wanted to tell the audience a little bit about you, because you have an incredibly impressive background for someone who is only in your first term in Congress. And Congresswoman Crockett has prioritized throughout her career, the civil liberties of underrepresented communities. That's been the focus of her attention. She had a successful career as a public defender, a civil rights and criminal defense attorney. And then in 2020 she successfully ran for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives. And she was then the sole black freshman and the youngest black lawmaker in Texas. And she served one term before she decided to run for Congress, but it was a very eventful term. She filed more bills than any other freshman in the Texas House, and she assembled a wide coalition to pass a landmark criminal justice reform through The House in Texas. And she also founded the Texas Progressive Caucus while she was there. And after her one term in the legislature, she was elected to the U.S. Congress winning election to replace a legendary U.S. congresswoman who had retired after serving nearly 30 years in The House.

([02:05](#)):

And no surprise to anyone who has watched her throughout her career, Congresswoman Crockett was immediately named the freshman representative in the house democratic leadership, making her one of the very few black women ever elected to the Democratic House leadership. I can tell you that when you meet her, it's immediately evident. She's a high achiever, she's a doer. She knows how to get things done. She got her BA in Business Administration from Rhodes College and earned her law degree from the University of Houston. So Congresswoman Crockett. I wanted to start just by asking you, given that you were elected to the Texas House at such a young age and made such a difference, what prompted you to want to take up that challenge and run for the legislature?

Rep. Jasmine Crockett ([02:53](#)):

Well, Jason, first I want to say, let's make sure that we are very clear about this. Young in politics is different than young in the regular world. It's kind of like dog years. It's human years. Because I have a lot of colleagues right now that are in the U.S. House that are willing to their eighties. So you can be my age and still be considered young for some reason. But no, I don't think I was that young. I was just kind of young for politics, especially for a black woman in politics, when we look back to even the president, the president became a senator in his twenties. I can't conceptualize being able to be the Texas senator in my twenties and even now, I don't think the state of Texas would be ready for me to be the senator in my forties. But nevertheless, as a practicing lawyer, I really was just pretty frustrated with all that I had seen going on in the courtrooms as I was practicing law anywhere from East Texas to North Texas.

([03:55](#)):

We have 254 counties, and I always tell people a story about a young kid that really prompted me to want to do more. And Texas is one of only five states in which at the age of 17, you're considered an adult only for criminal justice purposes. And with that, I had a 17-year-old who unfortunately had been placed on probation prior to ever being linked up with me as a young public defender. And he was placed on probation for a felony. His felony crime was burglary of a building. And to be more specific about what was entailed in that burglary, is that he had broken into the concession stand at his high school, stole less than \$20 worth of candy, and the prosecutor felt as if this is what warranted him being placed on probation. Unfortunately, his criminal defense attorney also agreed, and you can only imagine 17-year-old single mom, she wasn't able to get him into his probation officer to show up to all of his probation meetings.

[\(04:59\)](#):

And ultimately I got him as a young public defender and the judge decided to revoke him and give him a maximum sentence of two years. Not because he picked up a new crime, not because he had a dirty way, but because he could not get to see his probation officer because he was a 17-year-old who was in high school. That's when I first decided there must be something that is broken about our system, and it wasn't seeking justice.

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Took me a while to finally get to the point that I was extremely frustrated, but by the time I ran for the State House, I had been doing civil rights work as well and finally came to the conclusion that it's not good enough to go and represent a family once their loved one has been severely maimed, harmed, or has been killed. But instead, you needed someone that would write laws that would minimize the contacts that one has to have with law enforcement that would be understanding of real life challenges and write laws that really make sense for who we were as a society and really begin to look like a justice system. And so that is why I ultimately decided to run for the State House.

Jason Altmire [\(06:08\)](#):

I think that background, it's instructive to the mindset that a member of Congress brings is based upon their background, their professional experiences, what they've seen in the past and the various roles that they've had. And when you decided to go into the State House, you made criminal justice reform a priority, you made civil liberties a priority. How would you say that the experience of being a public defender, which I think is a fairly unique background for somebody going into politics, not as an attorney necessarily, but as a public defender, which is a little bit different, and you see examples like you described. How did that entire experience color your view on public policy generally?

Rep. Jasmine Crockett [\(06:54\)](#):

Oh, absolutely. It's interesting because right now all we hear is there's a two tier justice system. That's what we continue to hear from the former president. And I agree with him, which is a very rare thing for me to do. But when you're right, you're right. And that two tier justice system did not just sprout up once he was charged. It is a system that has been built into the system in and of itself. And so I think it is important to have people that have dealt with people that, in my opinion, have become victims of circumstances and found themselves in a criminal, what I would consider to be a lot of times, injustice system. We have so many people that have found themselves behind bars because they're poor. So I agree with the president, but for completely, or the former president for completely different reasons. In that this two tier justice system is affording him an opportunity to continue to walk as a free man with over 80 counts of criminal charges pending in four different jurisdictions.

[\(07:58\)](#):

Something that I would never be able to have or I would love for him to learn about the type of harm that he created, that he basically lauded when it came down to the Central Park Five, young black boys that he had already decided were convicted of these heinous crimes to the extent that he decided to spend money. Money that I'm sure he wishes he had back in his pockets today. But he decided to spend money on making sure that these young black boys who did not necessarily come from families that were born with the same silver spoon that he was born with in his mouth, to be able to afford the type of attorneys that would give them the best fighting chance to hopefully never have to spend any unjust day in jail or prison. But unfortunately, as we all know, those young black boys did not have access to the best lawyers or access to the most experienced lawyers, and they ended up caught up.

[\(09:12\)](#):

And so the question is if we really believe in a representative government then who speaks for those that don't have the millions of dollars to put into the coffers of the people that are running for office? Who speaks to those experiences of those that potentially have never cared about politics, potentially have never even thought about reaching out to an elected representative on any level? I think it has to be those of us that have been in the trenches, whether it's because we had experiences as being victims of the same system that we are trying to better, or if it's literally because that was the work that we did.

[\(09:53\)](#):

And I think that when you talk about diversity, the reason that diversity matters, and I wish our governor understood this, is because we are not a monolithic society. We are made up of everybody from all different types of backgrounds, culturally speaking, but also socioeconomic backgrounds. And if you're going to have a government that is inclusive and is considerate of everyone that is living here, you need to have people that have more than one perspective. And I think that that is the type of perspective that I've been able to add not only on the state level, but on the federal level.

Jason Altmire [\(10:39\)](#):

Picking up from there, you brought that mindset and that perspective to the US Congress. You won election in 2022, were immediately put on as the freshman representative to the democratic leadership. And again, you could set your priorities as a member of Congress in any way that you choose. You decided to focus on the issues that you've just articulated, of criminal justice, of civil liberties and protection of human rights. And how does that mindset affect your thinking on higher education in specifically? Because this is how we've come to know you in the sector for your support of proprietary career schools and educational opportunities across the board. As a very progressive voice in the Congress, how does that mindset translate into your views on higher education specifically?

Rep. Jasmine Crockett [\(11:33\)](#):

Yeah, this is such an important link to make sure we make clear. There are those that want to believe that crime or social economic struggles are simply a result of bad people. And instead, I believe that we need to provide as many economic opportunities to all people as possible. And economic opportunities, you can't talk about them without talking about education, and education comes in different forms. There are those that believe that the only type of education that can provide for an economic opportunity is a four-year degree, which I don't subscribe to. It definitely provides lots of economic student loan financial obligations. But I think that it is important that we again, have policies that meet who we are as a people.

[\(12:31\)](#):

My godmother has always been a huge influence on me. Her and my mother have been friends since they were in second grade, and neither one of them grew up in wealth at all. So much to the contrary that they taught themselves how to sew and so that they wouldn't have to wear the same clothes to school. They would save their lunch money and then they would sew matching outfits to wear to school. And they started sewing when they were in elementary.

[\(13:02\)](#):

And, of course, my mom never wanted me to have to experience a life similar to that. Her goal was to always give me something better, and it meant that she provided as many avenues as it relates to education as possible. And she went on to graduate from high school as the salutatorian in a class that she skipped into. So she graduated at 16 and then she got a full ride to go to Wash U and graduated from Wash U at the age of 19. So she's a bit of an overachiever, but I will tell you that my godmother, while they came from similar backgrounds, my godmother said college wasn't for her.

[\(13:42\)](#):

And she used to talk to me and say, don't feel pressured into believing that you've got to go to college or that you've got to do exactly what your mom did. She told me that she used to always say, college just isn't for everyone, or she tried to make sure that I just didn't feel like I had to do it just because. And I think that that is what we're not really doing good at in general, is making sure that people have all the options. My godmother ended up very well-to-do for sure, but it was about the fact that she went more a technical route. She decided to go a different space, and that was okay. And I always knew that because here it was, I grew up looking up to two main women, my mom and my godmom who had completely different paths, but they both ended up becoming very successful.

[\(14:39\)](#):

And it said a lot to me. Now, granted, I went on to get a law degree and I went on to get a law degree just because it was the work that I wanted to do. It was kind of required. But I always tell students when I talk to them, is to find your passion and follow that passion, whatever it is. Because I personally believe that you will always be more successful if you're doing what you're happy with, what you're passionate about. And we need to make sure that we invest in educational opportunities specifically for those that come from families like that of my mom and of my godmom. Because they have every right to everything that this world has to offer them, and it's just a matter of giving them a chance.

[\(15:27\)](#):

Again, my mom didn't grow up with much, but that didn't mean that she could not be educated. It didn't mean that she couldn't be successful. To the contrary, I would almost argue that she was hungrier for success because of the circumstances. And these are the types of things that really inform my policy and my perspective because I think about how amazing these women are, and it is just a matter of having opportunities.

Jason Altmire [\(15:56\)](#):

That is such an amazing story and anecdote because it gives power to the voice that you can accomplish anything, and it doesn't have to be a traditional path through four-year education. And you've seen it firsthand in your own family. One of the first votes you had to take or decisions you had to make related to higher education was in the debate on expanding the Pell Grant early in your first term in 2023, they tried to exclude proprietary career schools from eligibility. So a student attending that type of school would be ineligible for the increase in the Pell Grant.

[\(16:39\)](#):

And you as a Democrat, as a vocal and proud progressive as someone who's very visible in the black caucus and in the Democratic caucus, you stood up and you went against your leadership and you joined 16 other Democrats to oppose that provision. And in the end, for-profit schools were included, and students who attend proprietary career schools are eligible still. How did you as a freshman think through that issue knowing that you're trying to make a good impression on your leadership, you're trying to make a difference and position yourself within the institution, but yet you want to represent your constituents as well. How did your thinking go on that issue?

Rep. Jasmine Crockett ([17:24](#)):

I will tell you that I really appreciate my leadership a lot, because they are not trying to wrangle us as members. They're not applying pressure, and I think it's easier not to apply pressure when you're not in the majority or dealing with a very slim majority. But even then, one of the things that they've always made clear is that they want people to vote their districts and their conscience, and it's just a matter of they need to know. They don't want to get caught up saying that they're going to deliver something and they're unable to deliver it. So it's more so just about communication. But this is something that I've believed in for some time.

([18:10](#)):

And even in the State House, I remember working on some legislation with one of my Republican colleagues who is Freedom Caucus. We were working on similar types of legislation just to make sure that there was an increase to access for the non-traditional routes, specifically trades in high schools, making sure that we were doing more to kind of bring that in. So I will tell you this, that I will always vote my conscience and my conscience is always with the people of my district.

([18:47](#)):

At the end of the day, I only got here because of the people and they are my ultimate bosses. And I am one that absolutely wants to make sure that we are very mindful of educational opportunities. And if you think about it, when you're looking at something like the Pell Grant, why should it be that we are denying anyone who is in whatever educational institution they're in access to those monies? They are going to become good taxpaying citizens, which means we will get the money back. The chances of us not getting that money back are slimmer if we're talking about someone who is not pursuing some sort of education in some way. So I just didn't think it was fair, and that was my stance. And as taxpayers that understand the cycles, there's going to be amazing students that are going to come out and contribute so much to our society. We'll get our money back, and that's what we're doing. We're making an investment, and the return on that investment is going to be greater than anything that we put in.

Jason Altmire ([20:08](#)):

The last question, as we close, related to this is you've been so understanding and sympathetic to the people who are going through life transition and understand that their path for their unique circumstances may go through a career school. There are others on both sides of the aisle, but primarily on the democratic side who are more skeptical of that path. What would you say to people who are listening to this program that wanted to have a conversation with their elected representative? Let's say they're in a different position philosophically and are less supportive of the career college sector. What advice would you give in articulating to a member of Congress why they should think differently about for-profit career schools?

Rep. Jasmine Crockett ([20:59](#)):

I really just think seeing is believing. I think that it's really important for a lot of the misconceptions or a lot of the negative attention that sometimes has been brought on these institutions for those myths to be dispelled. And it's so much easier. I love Hill days, and I always encourage people to come on the Hill for those days because the house belongs to the people. And so I think that the people should be here, and I always tell people to tell their personal story. And so whatever your personal story is, I think it's important that you share it. And those are the things that we will carry with us.

[\(21:37\)](#):

When you have someone who talks about how their life has been changed because they were able to get this education, how their income has been increased, and now they can take care of their obligations for themselves or their families, and they didn't know what else they were going to do and how, you know what, it wasn't practical for them, say potentially as a mom that is single, or even just someone who is just like, listen, "A four-year institution isn't for me, but that doesn't mean that I can't become a productive member of our society." I think it's just important for the real world stories to be told to people in real time, for them to say, "You know what? I had this opinion before, but then I met this person who basically gave me their testimony on how their life was bettered or changed, and they potentially wouldn't have been able to attend without the assistance of the Pell Grant." Or whatever the story is, I just think it's important to make sure that those stories are told.

Jason Altmire [\(22:42\)](#):

Well, Congresswoman, thank you so much for your support. Thank you for your time. It is true, your door is always open. You are responsive. I know you love to visit with your constituents and tour schools and have people visit with you when they're in Washington. So just thank you for the work that you're doing. Thank you for the support that you have provided, and good luck to you in what we know is going to be a very long and productive career. And thank you for being with us today.

Rep. Jasmine Crockett [\(23:09\)](#):

Thanks so much. Have a good one, Jason.

Jason Altmire [\(23:13\)](#):

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Speaker 3 [\(23:34\)](#):

Voxtopica.