

# Miami Herald

## Miami Northwestern students head to the White House

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OFFICE OF U.S. REP. FEDERICA WILSON

Congresswoman Frederica S. Wilson (bottom row in hat) poses on the U.S. Capitol steps in Washington, D.C., on Thursday with Miami participants in her 5000 Role Models program.

In what has become an annual ritual, young male students from Miami-Dade County boarded a plane to Washington, D.C., before dawn on Thursday to attend the Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference.

But this year's trip is different — and perhaps more important — for the 24 young men selected to travel to the nation's capital.

All two dozen students are in the 5,000 Role Models of Excellence mentorship program at Miami Northwestern High, the Liberty City school that has been racked with grief since three students were murdered in separate shootings.

“We know that Miami Northwestern has been dealing with some trials and tribulations lately, and some negative light has been shed on the school,” said Paul Wilson, who leads the program for Miami-Dade County Public Schools. “So we want to shed some positive light on the school.”

With fresh haircuts and the signature red ties of the 5,000 Role Models, the students went to D.C. with a lofty goal. These black teenagers, growing up in rough neighborhoods, say they want to shatter stereotypes about their community.

“People say nothing good comes out of Liberty City, so I just want other people to know that there *is* something good that comes out of Liberty City,” said Keno Tate, president of the program’s Northwestern chapter.

The 5,000 Role Models is a mentoring and drop-out prevention program for black and Hispanic boys. Launched more than 20 years ago by Congresswoman Frederica Wilson, it provides positive male role models for boys who sometimes have none.

Angelo Babel, vice president of the Northwestern chapter, said fractured families take a toll on many students. “If there were more fathers in the homes, and there were more role models to lead us, to lead our young men on the right track, maybe we wouldn’t have so much trouble and problems in the neighborhood.”

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Angelo Babel, Northwestern student

Angelo, 17, grew up in Brownsville and credits a handful of men for keeping him on track: his stepfather, pastor and school counselor LarMarc Anderson. Angelo is a junior pastor at his church, is enrolled in drama class and has dreams of attending Bethune-Cookman University after he graduates this year.

“I just hope that everyone recognizes that Northwestern is not about violence. I just want everyone to know we’re about academic excellence — or excellence, period. In sports, classrooms, around the school extracurricular activities,” Angelo said.

The 5,000 Role Models has been sending students to Washington on all-expenses paid trips for about five years. But it’s the first time the group all comes from the same school, the home of the Bulls.

“I graduated from Miami Northwestern Senior High School, and I feel a lot of pride in this school,” Congresswoman Wilson said. “I personally am really upset about what’s happening in the surrounding community as it relates to little black boys, and I’m trying to get to the bottom of it.”

### **3 students killed since May**

Maurice Harris was a student at the school when he was killed Sept. 7 in a drive-by shooting. Just days later, Randall Dwaine Robinson III was shot multiple times and killed while walking to the store. Both were 17 years old.

Another Northwestern student was killed in May when he got caught in gunfire at his apartment complex. He was 15.

“We’re trying not to let the loss go in vain,” Angelo said. “Me being here with all my brothers doing something productive, giving back to the community so maybe this can stop, it feels great.”

The young men heading to Washington all gathered on Tuesday after school in the on-campus salon where students learn cosmetology.

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Frederica Wilson, Congresswoman

While they chatted with counselors, barbers from Clippers & Scissors and Home Team Barbershop arrived from as far away from Homestead to cut the boys' hair. They will form the receiving line at caucus events, attend a town hall for My Brother's Keeper, the initiative launched by President Barack Obama, and tour the White House. Maybe — hopefully — they'll even get the chance to meet the president.

“They will be with everyone that's of note across this country. When you expose children to that type of lifestyle, they don't come back and shoot up the community,” Wilson said.

At the White House, the students are scheduled to meet with high-ranking Obama administration staff — men who “look like your sons,” a school administrator told a group of parents attending a pre-trip meeting Tuesday night. Malinda Pasley nodded her head in approval and smiled. Her youngest son, 16-year-old Keytron Jordan, is on the trip.

“Children of color are stereotyped because of what we see on the news. So when she said that, I related to that,” Pasley said. “I nod saying, yes — that's the hope for my son.”

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