

A person in a dark suit is seen from behind, standing in a dark interior and looking out a large, brightly lit window. Through the window, the U.S. Capitol building is visible, centered and slightly hazy. The scene is framed by dark, vertical architectural elements.

PEOPLE, PRIDE & POWER

# BREAKING THROUGH

IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION





# BREAKING THROUGH



**Title:** BREAKING THROUGH

**Production Company:** Atlantis Moon

**Director:** Cindy L. Abel

**Type of Film:** Documentary Feature

**Total Run Time:** 67:53

**Synopsis:** In Breaking Through, openly LGBT elected officials at all levels – including the first gay US Senator, Tammy Baldwin – share their stories of self-doubt and triumph over multiple barriers ranging from race and poverty to gender and sexual orientation, revealing a deeply personal, rarely-seen side of politicians and gay people.

Though featuring politicians, it isn't about politics: it's about people who feel fear and shame, yearning to live meaningful lives. They reveal how they broke through barriers internally - daring to believe something different than what they were told - and externally to achieve the future they envisioned. By showing that "anything is possible," they impact people from all walks of life.

**Featuring:** Tammy Baldwin, U.S. Senator; Barney Frank, former Congressman; Kathy Webb, State Representative, Arkansas; Kate Brown, Oregon Secretary of State, Oregon; Joel Burns, Ft Worth City Council; Alex Wan, Atlanta City Council. Additionally, elected officials at various levels of government, in rural and urban settings, many of whom are the "only" or the "first" in their state or country.



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# OVERVIEW

Long before they struggled with their sexual orientation or gender identity, each of the people interviewed faced challenges such as race, poverty, gender and religious expectations. By refusing to allow those to define their future, they grew strong and used the same resilience to deal with being LGBT.

We follow three primary subjects who represent “firsts” in their respective positions. Included in their stories are interviews with family members.

**Alex Wan** is a first generation American who was bullied for being Asian, a geek and gay. Wrestling with coming out, he surmised that “being gay would be more of a barrier than being Asian.” When he ran for office, his father worried, fearing Alex would face the resistance he’d observed in the 60s in the South.

A daughter of the Deep South, **Kathy Webb’s** political involvement led her to national leadership. She felt defeated as she realized she was lesbian. Celebrating Geraldine Ferraro’s nomination as Vice-President, she thought “I could achieve high office as a woman, but not as a lesbian.” Twenty years later, her otherwise-supportive family was horrified at her decision to run for State Representative, fearful she would be hurt.

**Tammy Baldwin** never knew her father and her mother struggled with prescription drug addiction so she was raised by her grandparents, determined to prove her worth. A high school stand-out, she then double-majored in government and mathematics at Smith College. Coming to terms with being lesbian, she was initially convinced that she would have to choose between living openly and her career dreams. Tapped to run for office, she determined to do so openly. While supportive, her grandmother was afraid, perhaps foretelling of later death threats.

Their stories are complemented by elected officials at various levels of government, in rural and urban settings, many of whom are the “only” or the “first” in their state or country: from the first openly LGBT US Senator to the Mayor of Houston and the first transgendered judge in the US, as well as the Latina, lesbian sheriff of Dallas County and a young African American who grew up homeless and serves on the Springfield City Council.

## Story Structure

**Introduction BREAKING THROUGH** highlights the world in which teens are growing up. We see the impact on now-openly LGBT elected officials – some of whom who were bullied as kids – and the mental anguish they all experienced, wondering how to choose between who they were and what they wanted to become.

**Act 1: The Spark** Elected officials let us see beyond their public persona and reveal unknown stories about their early years and their deeply personal struggles. They tell us how they dared to believe something different about themselves than what they were told about gays and eventually chose to push against the seemingly-immutable barriers, including the decision to run for office.

**Act 2: The Journey** Just because they had the courage to run as openly LGBT doesn’t mean the internal voices of past shame were completely silenced. We learn how they confronted the demons theirs and those of others – of placing one’s personal life in a very public eye. We hear from their families about fears for their loved one, why some of them opposed the decision and how the anti-gay attacks broke their hearts.

**Act 3: The Victory** These elected officials share why being open matters, how it actually contributed to their success and what they consider their responsibility as they serve both the constituents who elected them and a broader, worldwide community of LGBT people looking for hope.

**Conclusion:** They offer their visions for the future – one in which being LGBT is not an obstacle – and encourage anyone who is struggling to know that the possibilities are limitless, regardless of the reason they are feeling “less than” or different.

BREAKING THROUGH offers stories of struggle and triumph from LGBT elected officials who have won high office despite prejudice and fear. Additionally, elected officials at various levels of government, in rural and urban settings, are featured, many of whom are the “only” or the “first” in their state or country: from the first openly LGBT US Senator to the Mayor of Houston and the first transgendered judge in the US, as well as the Latina, lesbian sheriff of Dallas County and a young African American who grew up homeless but now serves on the Springfield City Council.

**Tammy Baldwin**, US Senator, WI – first openly LGBT person elected to the U.S. Senate

**Kathy Webb**, State Representative, AR - first openly LGBT elected official in Arkansas; 1st woman Arkansas State Legislature Budget Chair

**Kate Brown**, Secretary of State, Oregon; 1st openly LGBT official elected to statewide office in the US; only openly bisexual serving in statewide office

**Joel Burns**, Ft Worth City Council - 1st openly LGBT Ft Worth City Councilmember; the video of his speech sharing his high school experience of being bullied garnered over 2.5 million hits on YouTube.

**Alex Wan**, City Council, Atlanta, GA – 1st Asian-American and 1st openly gay man on Atlanta City Council, only openly LGBT Asian-American in the Deep South

**Lupe Valdez**, Sheriff, Dallas County, TX – 1st female, Latina, Democrat and openly LGBT sheriff in Dallas County; 1st openly LGBT Sheriff in the US

**Phyllis Frye**, Judge, Houston Municipal Court - 1st transgendered judge in the US

## West and West Coast

- Kate Brown, Secretary of State, OR – 1st openly LGBT official elected to statewide office in the US
- Nicole LeFavour, State Senator, ID – 1st and only openly LGBT elected official in Idaho
- Christine Kaufmann, State Senator, MT – 1st and only openly LGBT Montana State Senator
- Bryce Bennett, State Representative, MT – youngest state legislator in Montana (age 25) and 1st openly gay man elected in Montana
- Diane Sands, State Representative, MT – 1st openly LGBT elected official in Montana
- Rives Kistler, Justice, Oregon Supreme Court - 1st openly LGBT elected to a state Supreme Court
- Virginia Linder, Justice, Oregon Supreme Court - 1st open lesbian elected to a state Supreme Court; 1st woman in Oregon to be elected to the Supreme Court without prior appointment
- Todd Gloria, San Diego City Council President - 1st openly gay man on San Diego City Council
- Bonnie Dumanis, San Diego County Attorney General, CA - 1st openly LGBT elected Attorney General in the US
- John Perez, Speaker of the Assembly, CA - 1st openly LGBT elected Speaker of any state legislature
- Toni Atkins, State Assemblymember, CA - 1st openly LGBT Majority Whip in California

## Southwest

- Annise Parker, Mayor, Houston, TX – Houston is the largest US city with an openly LGBT Mayor
- Phyllis Frye, Judge, Houston Municipal Court - 1st transgendered judge in the US
- Joel Burns, City Council, Ft Worth, TX – 1st openly LGBT Ft Worth City Councilmember; the video of his speech sharing his high school experience of being bullied garnered over 2.5 million hits on YouTube
- Lupe Valdez, Sherriff, Dallas County, TX – 1st female, Latina, openly LGBT sheriff in Texas

## Midwest and Midsouth

- Tammy Baldwin, US Senator, WI – 1st openly LGBT person elected to US Senate; 1st woman from Wisconsin
- Kathy Webb, State Representative, AR – 1st openly LGBT elected in Arkansas, 1st woman Budget Chair of Arkansas State Legislature

## Northeast

- Barney Frank, US Representative, MA – longest-serving openly LGBT member of Congress
- David Mixner, New York, New York – international human rights activist
- David Cicilline, US Representative, RI- 1st openly LGBT person elected to Congress from Rhode Island
- Amaad Rivera, City Council, Springfield, MA – 1st openly LGBT elected official in Springfield, one of the youngest Springfield City Council members, grew up homeless

## Southeast

- Karla Drenner, State Representative, GA – 1st openly LGBT State Representative in the Deep South
- Kesha Cunningham, Mayor Pro Tem, Decatur, GA – 1st openly LGBT African-American elected in Georgia
- Alex Wan, City Council, Atlanta, GA – 1st Asian-American and 1st openly gay man on Atlanta City Council, only openly LGBT Asian-American in the Deep South
- Joan Garner, Fulton County Commission, GA – 1st openly LGBT elected to a County Commission in Georgia
- Brian Bates, City Council, Doraville, GA – 1st openly LGBT Republican elected in Georgia





## REVIEWS

"4 out of 4 Globes. The dozens of diverse LGBT elected officials profiled in this absorbing documentary are heartening role models who give a voice to minorities. The subjects' candor is quite forceful. Affecting testimonies address the agony of keeping one's sexual identity secret, the impact of coming out, and – in the case of Senator Tammy Baldwin, and Hispanic Democratic Lesbian Sheriff Lupe Valdez (in Republican Dallas County) – the thrill of victory in a hard-fought campaign." (*Gary M. Kramer, www.Metro.us*)

"One of five 'don't miss' movies at WorldFest." (Joe Lydon, Houston CultureMap)

"Riveting and triumphant, from the onset, this important documentary compellingly looks at the struggles, fear, victories and challenges that face LGBT elected officials from all levels of our government. Through deep and personal interviews rarely seen from politicians, director Cindy Abel delicately weaves together all of these trials and tribulations. Inspirational as well as poignant, the overarching message of *Breaking Through* is that these LGBT elected officials give us hope that anything is possible." (*Kelly Burkhardt, Philadelphia QFest*)

"*Breaking Through* earns its medal of distinction!" (*Tracy Cain, Arkansas Free Press*)

"*Breaking Through* is an amazing documentary showing us some of the nation's best and brightest LGBT advocates - including the amazing Tammy Baldwin who broke another barrier this past November becoming the first openly gay member of the U.S. Senate. This film helped restore my faith in government, because there are good people out there fighting for us, it just gets drowned out with all the insanity that gets reported." (*Matt Jamieson, Vital Voice*)

"Inspiring and at times heart-wrenching" (*Megan Smith, OutSmart Magazine*)

"*Breaking Through* is a rich, fast-paced, spellbinding film that makes you take stock of your own life even as you hear the politicians take stock of theirs. How director Cindy Abel got politicians, famous for saying a lot without saying much, to expose their vulnerability is one of the wonders of this documentary. Some of the revelations are so shocking you find yourself thinking, 'Did she just say what I think she said?!' " (*Michael Alvear, Huffington Post*)