

Dilawar Syed

Dilawar Syed is an entrepreneur, educator, and former senior U.S. government official working at the intersection of business, technology, and public policy. He serves on the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin's LBJ School of Public Affairs and McCombs School of Business. He is the founder of the LBJ Business Policy Forum, which brings together business leaders, policymakers, and scholars to advance ideas that strengthen American competitiveness. His teaching and policy work focus on AI, economic security, commercial diplomacy, small business, and the role of government in driving innovation and broadly shared prosperity.



Dilawar previously served as Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration, following confirmation by a bipartisan vote of the U.S. Senate. He helped lead efforts to expand access to capital, federal contracting, and entrepreneurship support — particularly for underserved and rural communities. He also helped coordinate the SBA's response to major disasters, including Hurricanes Helene and Milton, the Maui wildfires, and the collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Earlier, as Special Representative for Commercial and Business Affairs, Dilawar served as America's top commercial diplomat at the U.S. Department of State. He championed U.S. companies and workers in markets around the world, mobilized private-sector support for Ukraine following Russia's invasion, and advanced strategic commercial opportunities in technology, energy, aviation, infrastructure, and defense.

Dilawar brings over two decades of experience building and leading technology companies in Silicon Valley. He served as CEO of Lumiata, an AI healthcare company backed by Khosla Ventures and BlueCross BlueShield, and established Freshworks' North American business before the company's successful IPO. Earlier in his career, he held leadership roles at Yahoo!, SAP, and Siebel Systems. He currently serves on the board of and advises AI startups.

His civic leadership includes service on President Barack Obama's White House Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. In California, he launched the California Entrepreneurship Task Force with Governor Newsom's office, connecting Silicon Valley with entrepreneurs and communities across the state's rural heartland.

Dilawar holds an MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor's degree in computer science and economics from The University of Texas at Austin. He is writing a forthcoming memoir about his journey as an immigrant, entrepreneur, and public servant — and the enduring promise of American leadership.