

# A LIFE IN POLITICS

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From a young age, I wanted to get involved in politics. My earliest memories on the subject are from riding around in my father's pickup truck on my way home from Catholic preschool listening to Rush Limbaugh. At the time, I thought it was the coolest thing ever, and I knew I wanted to get involved in the political battles that I heard about on the radio.

For the past several years, I have had the opportunity to work in Congress and the Trump Administration. During that time, I had a lot of great experiences that allowed me to see firsthand how the system works.

One of the earliest lessons I learned was the importance of having a good team. I was an intern in a freshman office on Capitol Hill. The member had just won a special election, and midterms were looming. In less than a year, he had to make the case to voters that he was their man for the job. To make matters more interesting, the district was a swing district. It was anyone's guess how the election would go.

While we were all very different people, the electoral sword of Damocles dangling over our heads pulled us all together. We worked great as a unit. The odds were long, but thanks to the siege mentality that quickly crept into our minds, we came together and succeeded.

I have been a part of several different teams in Washington since then, and I can think of only one that was better.

Though, I have also seen first-hand how a bad team can fail. In another office, the district was a rural GOP stronghold, and victory was guaranteed. The boss listened to you based on how long you were there but gave little credence to what you could do for the good of the team.

The other staffers all had radically differing views on what the office should be doing. I thought we should be doing our best to represent the people of our district, but other staffers wanted to use the office to advance their own careers. One wanted to become a staff director of his favorite committee, another wanted to do his time and become a lobbyist, still another was a leftist who wanted us to go against the wishes of the district because she knew better. There were ten people on that team, but we got less done in two years than I did as an intern in five months.

Ultimately, these experiences would culminate in one of my great rules for governing, "personnel is policy." Putting together a team, dedicated to a common purpose, can achieve more in Washington than a collection of policy wonks and fanatic partisans pulling in separate directions. To get anything done, requires the right personnel for the job. This is true for both their capability to do their job but also their ability to work together.

For the most part, I worked in speechwriting and communications. I always naturally gravitated towards working in communications roles. I was fascinated as a child by talk radio. I was on the debate team in high school. I have always been blessed to be a good writer. All of those factors pushed me into communications, but what I genuinely love about this type of work is that it is about verbal battles for why your ideas are the best for the American people.

Growing up, it often appeared that working-middle class families, like mine, were not the focus of conversation, and I wanted to go into politics to help fight for policies that would make their lives better. I also had the good fortune of growing up in a home where the Church was the cornerstone of everything, and I wanted to make sure that Catholics had the ability to live their faith because America can only be great with a vocal moral-majority. I sincerely wanted to use political power to help people, and I learned quickly that

communications must be paramount if you want to make a difference.

This led me to my second great rule, "communications is policy." Unless you actively engage the American people in a conversation explaining why your policies are best, your agenda is doomed to fail. You can only put into action your principles if you robustly defended them. Without dedicated communications work, you can have the best policies in the world, and they still will be dead on arrival.

A lot of people I have worked with in Washington consider communications to be unessential fluff. I have had chiefs of staff tell me that we do not need a communications strategy because we are a policy office. As a result, you have probably never even heard of those offices. I frequently got myself a lot of "stern talking to's" because I always argued that we could only do what we were sent to do in Washington by boldly explaining our position.

That probably comes down to the fact that a significant portion of the people in Washington have very little sense of fighting for a cause they believe in. I can name only a few people that actually thought deeply about the philosophic questions of governing and how that impacted our ability to help the American people.

But for the most part, staffers fall into one of three camps. You have policy wonks that only care about advancing their special interests. You also have staffers that only are interested in their side beating the other side. Finally, you have a handful of politicians that can navigate the swamp based on the compass of winning the next election.

I never really fit into any of these camps. I could never fully embrace the hive-mind mentality of so many staffers that the only thing that mattered was beating the other team because our side was right and their side was going to burn

for all eternity. A lot of the politicians were more interesting, but they only cared about winning elections and would never do anything with the authority that came from winning elections. They played too cautiously and were afraid of doing anything that might cost a vote. The policy wonks were the ones I understood the least. They could go on for hours about one specific issue, like labor policy regarding automated cars, and could not be bothered to think of anything else.

So, I ended up charting my own course in Washington. I did this by staying true to my principles, and always working hard to go the extra mile. I would stay late and go in on weekends. I would drop everything and travel across the country to go work on campaigns. I would always volunteer to be part of new working groups.

It is in volunteering for extra working groups that I had the opportunity to work on a lot of policies dealing with the intersection of faith and politics. I have always been passionate about my Catholicism, and in my own way I have tried to give back to the Church by ensuring Catholics could be part of shaping public policy.

At my core, I passionately believe that for our nation to truly flourish the Catholic Church must have a strong presence in the public square and an active voice in our ongoing debates. The teachings of the Church are timeless, and they provide the first principles we need to succeed. However, for this to happen, Catholics need the freedom to live their faiths free from bias and other forms of overt or covert prejudice. As a result, I often found myself working on faith-based issues and religious outreach projects.

Many staffers in Washington treat faith-based policy as a bottom tier issue, but my genuine desire to advance the teachings of the Church and my willingness to take the jobs no one else wanted greatly helped me in my career. More

importantly, battling to promote morality in the public square was perhaps the greatest reward of my time in Washington.

So even though I am not in government anymore, my fight for people like me and to champion causes near and dear to the Catholic Church continues. Fortunately, there are several key advantages to working at the Catholic League, and serving as our communications director, I am in a prime position to continue this battle.

First, the Catholic League is a much faster organization in terms of getting things done. In my short tenure here, the Catholic League has done more to try to influence the national conversation and public policy than I have at any one place in government.

In part, that is because we have a great team. Everyone deeply cares about our mission, and no one is actively working against us from inside. I have seen the deep state up close, and it is scary just how deep it truly is.

And unlike the deep state, the Catholic League does not have a byzantine bureaucratic network to negotiate. When I worked in government, I would have to write correspondence and speeches about a month in advance to get everyone to approve them. As a result, these materials were less timely because they were a month past their prime. Instead of producing a message that would convey the boss's opinion on a given topic, every staffer would water down the writing to justify their particular policy positions, which, more often than not, were in direct competition with one another. For the deep state, communications work is not about talking directly to the American people. They are battlegrounds for policy decisions.

This meant I spent more time trying to navigate the approval process between competing staffers that were ostensibly on the same team, and less on fine tuning what we needed to say to a particular audience. Instead of crafting a message, I would

frequently bounce back and forth between deep staters trying to find some sort of compromise. The amount of time I worked on writing was limited; working on getting approval of the message was the biggest part of the job.

At the Catholic League, we do not have that problem. When we see an issue, we target it immediately. There is no waiting for people to take a month to decide how they feel about the topic at hand. As a result, the days here are much busier, but always more rewarding.

In large part, that is because the Catholic League values the importance of a robust communications strategy. The team knows that unless we bring our issues to the people and enlist them to help in the fight, we cannot get anything done. We do that every day, and we accomplish a lot, which is good because I hate being bored.

So, my days are busier, the team is better, and there is a deeper appreciation for communications work, but my mission remains the same. I still want to be involved in the important fights about how best to improve the lives of average Americans, and the Catholic League has given me a great opportunity to do that. In a lot of ways, I guess I still am that kid riding around in his father's truck listening to talk radio.