



Young gun: Stacey Johnson

POLITICAL STRIPES

Stacey Johnson

In the summer of 2004, Stacey Johnson was an intern at ABC News. Her second week on the job, President Reagan died.

In the days that followed, the 21-year-old attended editorial meetings, shadowed Sam Donaldson, and was even on hand for Reagan's funeral at the National Cathedral. "I had a front-row seat for history," she says.

Earlier this month, Johnson was named chief of staff at the YG Network, a conservative advocacy group founded in 2011 by John Murray, a former deputy chief of staff to House Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia. Johnson was most recently deputy chief of staff to Republican Rep. Erik Paulsen of Minnesota.

A native of Southern California, Johnson moved with her family to Virginia Beach, Va., when she was 11. She studied media arts and design, with a minor in political communications, at James Madison University. Her intention was to become a news broadcaster, but she became involved in then-Virginia Attorney General Jerry Kilgore's unsuccessful 2005 gubernatorial bid.

After that, Johnson served as Cantor's political director during his 2006 reelection campaign, and later was communications director for Paulsen's 2008 race. "I like the pace and atmosphere of a campaign," she says. "I think it suits my personality.... I always joke that I would probably do a campaign every year, except I don't want to find a new job every November."

Christopher Snow Hopkins

IVORY TOWER

Daniel Harsha

"In the political arena, whatever the member says is the story, in and of itself," says Daniel Harsha, who until recently was the minority communications director for the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

"On Capitol Hill, you have a whole cohort of journalists that is ready, willing, and able to pounce on your boss's every word. It's not that hard to generate a story: You're just shooting out a press release or picking up the phone to call a reporter."

In an academic setting, however, that dynamic is reversed. University officials cultivate reporters, not the other way around.

"You have to be a lot more aggressive," says Harsha, now associate director of communications at Harvard University's Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation. "You've got to work a lot harder to wind yourself into the narrative.... When a professor speaks to a reporter, that's not a story."

At the Ash Center, Harsha will promote the research of an organization with a "bifurcated identity," he says. The primary mission of the 11-year-old center is to "address critical issues of governance and make governments more effective and responsive," according to its website, but it is also home to the John F. Kennedy School of Government's cadre of Asia specialists.

Harsha, who moved to Cambridge, Mass., earlier this month, says Harvard is a "breath of fresh air" after working on Capitol Hill for a decade.

"Washington seems to be really stagnant," he says. "We're really not passing major legislation anymore; we're barely keeping the lights on."

A native of Silver Spring, Md., Harsha is the grandson of New Dealers who came to Washington to work in President Roosevelt's administration. After graduating from Oberlin College, where he was editor of the campus newspaper, Harsha interned for then-Rep. Howard Berman, a California Democrat whom he describes as "one of a rare breed of members ... who knew the issues better than staff."

After receiving a master's degree from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, Harsha returned to Capitol Hill as a professional staff member at the Foreign Affairs Committee, where he specialized in multilateral and United Nations issues. When then-Chairman Berman lost his 2012 reelection bid, Harsha became the panel's communications director.

Harsha, 31, is married with a 14-month-old daughter.

C.S.H.

ADVOCACY GROUPS

Arina Grossu and Travis Weber

Arina Grossu considered herself an abortion-rights advocate until she saw a video in her ninth-grade theology class that “showed the horror of abortion,” she says.

“Up to that point, even though I was personally pro-life, I subscribed to the mantra: ‘I can’t decide for someone else what to do with their bodies.’ But when I saw what abortion does to the baby, I realized that no one has the right to do that to anyone else.... That video changed my whole life.”

Earlier this month, Grossu joined the Family Research Council as director of the Center for Human Dignity. She joins Travis Weber, who has been named director of the council’s Center for Religious Liberty.

Grossu, who was raised in northern New Jersey, studied philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, where she ran the campus chapter of the National Right to Life Committee during her senior year.

“When there’s a sector of society that doesn’t have a voice, someone has to step in,” she says. “I feel strongly about protecting not only the babies but also the women.... When the baby is killed, the woman is hurt. It is naive to think that a woman who aborts her own flesh and blood ... does not need support.”

After graduation, Grossu worked as a production assistant for the Catholic television channel EWTN and later at the Alexandria, Va.-based CRC Public Relations, coordinating media relations on behalf of anti-abortion advocacy groups. Along the way, she earned a master’s degree in theology from the Dominican House of Studies in Washington.

At the Center for Human Dignity, her man-

date is to “help the most defenseless people in society,” she says. “That includes the unborn, the oppressed, the disabled, and the elderly.”

The 31-year-old is given to quoting Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis.

Weber, who will head the Center for Religious Liberty, arrives from the Camp Hill, Pa.-based Boyle Litigation, where he litigated civil-rights cases in federal court.

A native of northern New Jersey, Weber was a midshipman at the Naval Academy, where he was captain of the Dinghy Sailing Team. (Weber has been inducted into the academy’s Athletic Hall of Fame.)

After four years flying E-6 aircraft out of Tinker Air Force Base outside Oklahoma City, Okla., Weber came to Washington for a job in construction management. An internship with Rep. Joe Pitts, R-Pa., renewed his interest in the philosophical underpinnings of the law, prompting him to enroll in Regent University Law School.

Under the aegis of the FRC, the 34-year-old will convene panels, write op-eds, build coalitions with like-minded organizations, and monitor issues related to religious liberty. “There are many cases popping up around the country involving public-school teachers and local legislators who are not allowed to express their faith.... These folks are the target of lawsuits.”

One of Weber’s priorities at the FRC is mobilizing the organization’s younger constituents. C.S.H.

AT THE BAR

Sheila P. Burke

When Sheila P. Burke became chief of staff to then-Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., he told her to consult his mother’s optometrist if she had questions about health care policy.

“The message was: You really need to talk to people who are deeply invested and care deeply about the delivery and financing of health care services,” says Burke, who has been promoted to head the federal public-policy group at law and lobbying firm Baker Donelson.

Burke, 63, embodies Dole’s philosophy. Not only is she an expert in health care policy, but she also worked as a staff nurse in Berkeley, Calif., early in her career.

At Baker Donelson, Burke will oversee 19 professionals, including former Reps. Nancy L. Johnson, R-Conn., and Ellen O’Kane Tauscher, D-Calif. Burke came to the firm in the late 2000s at the invitation of former Republican Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee.

Raised in San Francisco, Burke received a degree in nursing from the University of San Francisco, her father’s alma mater. (The elder Burke’s father, a lawyer, spent his entire career at Farmers Insurance Group; her mother, a British national, met her future husband during World War II.)

After earning a master’s degree in public administration from Harvard, Burke became deputy staff director of the Senate Finance Committee. Three years later, she was invited to become Dole’s chief of staff. When Burke asked him why he would hire a self-identified “liberal from California,” Dole replied, “I’m really more interested in the fact that you have taken care of patients.”

Burke remained with Dole for 11 years, serving as his chief of staff until the mid-1990s, when she was elected secretary of the Senate, the chief administrative officer in the upper chamber. From 1996 to 2000, she was executive dean at Harvard’s Kennedy School.

Burke has also served as a member of the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission and as chairwoman of the Kaiser Family Foundation’s board of trustees.

C.S.H.



Life support: Travis Weber and Arina Grossu