

ROLL CALL

The Pelosi You Haven't Heard of Makes Some Waves

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When Rep.-elect Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) got the call last year from Christine Pelosi inviting him to attend a candidate-training program she was heading, he admits that “he was not necessarily looking to take a long trip out of the district at that time.”

But Pelosi convinced him “how really important it would be,” Murphy said.

In hindsight, he’s glad he went.

The candidate “boot camp” held in Phoenix, Ariz., was his introduction to Speaker-designate Nancy Pelosi’s (D-Calif.) daughter, a woman he credits with influencing his ultimately successful campaign to oust veteran Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-Conn.).

“There were a lot of connections I was able to make and ideas I was able to gain access to that I wouldn’t have without her,” he said.

The 40-year-old Christine Pelosi — a former aide to Rep. John Tierney (D-Mass.) who left Capitol Hill in 2005 to return to her home town of San Francisco and set up her own consulting business — has established herself in two decades in politics as a Democratic player in her own right.

Pelosi, the second-eldest of the Speaker-designate’s five children, “is into [politics] more than any of her siblings,” said Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.). Her former boss Tierney, whom she worked for from 2001 to 2005, said: “I think she lives for” politics. He called her not just a Type A personality but “Type AAAA.”

This past cycle, in addition to traveling on campaign swings with her mother, she served as director of the 2006 Congressional Candidates Boot Camp sponsored by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees’ Public Employees Organized to Promote Legislative Equality political action committee and New House PAC, helping organize and emcee a series of candidate training sessions around the country.

Jim Gonzalez, a longtime friend and chairman of the New House PAC, said that he and Larry Scanlon of AFSCME had enlisted Pelosi’s help to jump-start the program in 2005 when they learned that she was returning to California. Gonzalez said Pelosi offered extensive Democratic “contacts without charging us” and worked without pay from either entity. Her mother even came to speak at some of the sessions.

Scanlon, who praised her savvy, added that Christine Pelosi's famous last name helped add gravitas to the training sessions. "Having the name Pelosi helps attract people's attention to the program and realize it's an important program to go through," he said.

"She has been in the trenches, and that's why her advice is useful to me," said Dan Maffei, a friend and former Democratic Congressional candidate who attended the boot camp before losing narrowly to Rep. Jim Walsh (R-N.Y.) this cycle. "Her mother couldn't tell me the things about running a campaign that Christine could tell me."

Pelosi, a techie who runs her eponymous consulting firm out of her home, is known to blast out e-mails to a listserv of friends. The missives are "usually amusing" but with some sort of political point, Maffei said. As part of her boot camp duties, she had a blog called Trail Mix. Still, she also often is seen with a notebook for jotting down ideas.

Pelosi is known for a relentless energy bordering on "freneticism" and for her "thoroughness," Maffei said. She was "school-marmish in terms of making sure [I] and other candidates had done their homework."

Pelosi, who grew up walking precincts and stuffing envelopes as part of her mother's political work, is a devout party woman. By age 22, the freshly minted Georgetown University graduate was executive director of the California Democratic Party, which her mother once chaired.

Since 1996 she has served as head of the state party's platform committee — to which she has brought a level of consensus-building that has helped the panel avoid the "food fights" of the past, said Bob Mulholland, a campaign adviser to the California Democratic Party.

Pelosi also is a Democratic National Committeewoman who, after the 2004 elections, co-founded its Veteran and Military Families Council because of her frustration that Democratic presidential nominee Sen. John Kerry (Mass.) had been "swift-boated" out of the election, she said.

Earlier in her career, Pelosi, who earned a law degree from the University of California Hastings College of the Law, spent some time as a deputy city attorney and assistant district attorney in San Francisco, making the leap to Washington, D.C., in the late 1990s to work as a special counsel for the Department of Housing and Urban Development under then-Secretary Andrew Cuomo. From there she moved to the House to work for Tierney.

But her tenure as the Massachusetts lawmaker's chief of staff was not without some controversy. Some questioned whether a former beau, then-Rep. Max Sandlin (D-Texas), landed a plum assignment on the House Ways and Means Committee because of her. (When questioned at the time, Nancy Pelosi said the relationship had "nothing to do with it.")

As for Christine Pelosi's influence on her mother's politics, several friends and associates said they could not point to a specific issue where she had shaped Pelosi's thinking. But some, such as Adrienne Elrod, a Democratic operative and close friend, broadly describe her as an "independent adviser" to her mother who was involved in Pelosi's election as House Minority Whip in 2001.

"Christine clearly knew what was going on in the Leader's office and ... the Leader's thinking on certain things," said Maffei, who worked on the Hill with her. He added: "They are a cell phone family," in constant contact.

"She will actually staff her mother when her staff is not nearby," said Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-Calif.), adding that: "She so reflects her mother's values."

Since moving back to California, friends said, Pelosi has maintained her role as her mother's representative and advocate.

California consultant Karen Skelton, a former Clinton White House aide, described Pelosi as a "conciierge" or "welcoming committee on behalf of her mother."

Though she maintains an apartment on Capitol Hill, Pelosi herself downplays her role in her mother's political world, saying, "She has her work she does and I have mine. ... She didn't tell me how to try my cases and I don't tell her how to do her job."

"She has a unique and different relationship with each of us," added Pelosi, who is single. "With my sisters who have kids, it's a different kind of relationship" more tied to their roles as moms. Meanwhile, she and her mother bond over their shared love of The New York Times crossword puzzle, Gabriel García Márquez novels and singing, though, she noted, "neither of us are very good."

She and her mother differ on their political emphasis, Pelosi said. While Nancy Pelosi focuses on "inside maneuverability," her daughter asserted that her "venue is outside mobilization" of the grass roots and net roots.

"She's much more diplomatic than I am, much more politic than I am," Pelosi said of the future Speaker. "I love a parade. I'll be waiving and dancing, and [once] she said: 'You have none of my natural shyness.'"

Outside of politics, Pelosi has a reputation as a rabid baseball fan and jokingly describes her dream job as Major League Baseball commissioner. She's so devoted to her beloved San Francisco Giants that she now lives across the street from the Giants' stadium and has endured heckling after showing up to Dodger Stadium sporting Giants attire. Pelosi's passion for the national pastime is so intense it's even served as a catalyst for a friendship with one of the nation's leading conservative voices and a frequent critic of her mother's, columnist George Will.

The two bonded at one of Will's opening day eve parties a few years back and since then have forged a friendship that has endured despite the fact that Pelosi is a "full-time, high-octane partisan," Will said. "She's fiercely devoted (a) to her mother and (b) to the Democratic Party.

"She called me the other day to upbraid me about a column about her mother" that she considered "lèse-majesté," he recalled. "I think she's unregenerate, and I'm an incorrigible ignorant in her view."

As for her future trajectory, Pelosi, who would like to stay involved with the boot camp, said she hasn't made any decisions about her "next step." Despite the suggestion from several friends and associates that she would make a good political candidate, Pelosi said: "There's not a crying need for another Pelosi on the ballot. ... I got a call today from a reporter saying, 'I heard you are going to run for X.' I say: "Oh no, no, no, not me.'"

While she plans to continue her substantial volunteer work on behalf of the Democratic Party, Pelosi has considered returning to the law, adding, "I'd like to go do something not related to politics."

She insists that her mother's elevation to Speaker will not affect her career. "I'm not a lobbyist," she said. "I'm not going to become one."

