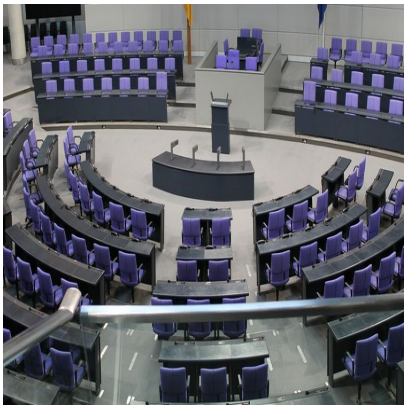

Description

For the longest time, scientists have ruled academia. They have made their mark in science and research. However, politics and other “unscientific” subjects were not their focus. This has also been mostly true for non-scientists with a background in the health sciences or “STEM” fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). These include engineers and healthcare workers. In addition, they have experience in academia or industry. But times are changing! Scientists are making their way into Congress and the US Congress election. Let us find out who are these scientists running government.

Who Ran for US Congress with a STEM Background?

Nine people with STEM/health sciences background were just elected to the 116th US Congress. Computer programmer Jacky Rosen ran against selling of consumer data by internet service providers without consent. She is a House representative in the present 115th Congress. In addition, she just won a seat in the Senate.

The other eight people won seats in the House. Ocean scientist Joe Cunningham drew the support of local officials of coastal cities. In like manner, industrial engineer Chrissy Houlahan supported making healthcare affordable for all. Biochemist and simultaneously a biochemical engineer, Sean Casten ran against a representative who called climate change science “junk.” On the other hand, nuclear engineer Elaine Luria supported expanding the Affordable Care Act. In contrast, aerospace engineer Kevin Hern ran on repealing it. Pediatrician Dr. Kim Schrier will be the first Congressperson who is also a doctor. Registered nurse Lauren Underwood ran on expanding healthcare access, whilst dentist Dr. Jeff Van Drew has supported stopping offshore drilling and preserving farmland.

What are their Academic Backgrounds?

The academic backgrounds of the newly elected officials vary. Some went to Ivy League schools, while some went to community and state schools. Besides a bachelor’s degree, several of them hold master’s degrees. A few of them also hold doctorates. The degrees of a few members are as follows:

- Rosen: Associate of Applied Science (AAS), Computing and Information Technology; Bachelor of Arts (BA), Psychology
- Cunningham: Bachelor of Science (BS), Ocean Engineering, Juris Doctor (JD)

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- Houlahan: BS, Industrial Engineering
- Casten: BA, Molecular Biology and Biochemistry; MS, Biochemical Engineering; Master of Engineering Management (MEM)
- Luria: BS, Physics; MEM
- Hern: BS, Electro-Mechanical Engineering; Master of Business Administration (MBA)
- Shrier: BA, Astrophysics; Medical Doctorate (MD), residency in Pediatrics
- Underwood: Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN); Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)
- Van Drew: Doctor of Medical Dentistry (DMD)

Why Should Scientists Be in the Government?

The issues that the government is facing today are difficult. A few of these include problems like lowering healthcare costs, creating sustainable energy resources, battling climate change, and countering threats to information security.

As a matter of fact, the scientific community may have a role to play to combat these issues. Scientists have knowledge that can inform decision making in these areas. They are trained to solve problems and understand complex issues. Scientists in the government can benefit the academic community. Their presence will possibly raise the awareness towards STEM fields and how they can help society. Moreover, the scientists in the parliament may put a human face on science. This, in turn, may lead to better funding of academic research.

Making the Shift to Politics

You may feel like getting into politics is daunting. There are ways to help with the shift. You may want to join an academic program like Elaine Luria, who attended the Sorenson Institute Political Leaders Program at the University of Virginia. Or may be you could focus your scientific work on problems with social relevance. You could try to get a grant for this research. Also, you could then tout these achievements in a political campaign. For example, Jacky Rosen helped to construct a solar array that decreased her synagogue's energy bill.

It is important to remember the value of publishing your work in these areas. The more visible your achievements are, the more visible you may be as a candidate running for local office or even the US Congress. We are yet to see how these scientists-turned-politicians help academia.

How do you think this will affect the academic community? Do you think it will be beneficial for the researchers? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments section below.

Category

1. Career Corner
2. PhDs & Postdocs

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