



JENNIFER DeCASPER

CHIEF OF STAFF TO SEN. TIM SCOTT (R-SC)

NationalJournal

Life in Brief

Hometown: Colorado Springs, CO

Current Residence: Washington DC Metro Area

Education:

- JD, University of Michigan, 2005
- BS, Mesa State College (now Colorado Mesa University), 2001

Family:

- Single mother to 12-year-old daughter
- Sister Chelsea DeCasper, Sen. Scott's Office Manager

Work History:

- Chief of Staff, Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC), 2015-Present
- Treasurer, Tomorrow is Meaningful (TIM) PAC, 2014-16
- Deputy Chief of Staff, Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC), 2013- 14
- Deputy Chief of Staff, Rep. Tim Scott (R-SC01), 2012-13
- Legislative Director, Rep. Tim Scott (R-SC01), 2011-12
- Legislative Assistant, Rep. Tim Scott (R-SC01), 2011
- Deputy District Attorney, Colorado 18th Judicial District, 2008
- Administrative Staff Assistant, Sen. Wayne Allard (R-CO), 2001-02

Quick Summary

As first black female Senate chief of staff, utilizes understated and human experience-centered strategy, largely shaped by personal experiences and desire for bipartisan collaboration

- Places human experience over ideology; places importance on not alienating people
- Casual, humorous demeanor that breaks from Capitol Hill status quo; does not seek spotlight
- Nontraditional path to the Hill, having moved to DC based on a feeling "it was where she was meant to be" and initially working as a ramp agent at Dulles Airport
- A "true conservative" with strong bipartisan ties, particularly on racial justice legislation
- Champions fiscally conservative legislation to alleviate poverty and boost opportunity in low-income communities (e.g. opportunity zones)
- Style shaped by unique position of working for an African American GOP member; says staff must "strategize in a way that your average white member or black member doesn't"

Approach and Motivations

Understated, intellectual approach

- Despite a self-described bad interview, hired by Scott for having a "sharp mind but a sensitive heart"
- Scott describes her as the "thinking" and he the "feeling"
- Avoids the spotlight and Hill social circuit

Bipartisan efforts, particularly with black women who also serve as hill leaders

- Congeniality contributes to knack for bipartisan collaboration
- Collaborates with fellow chiefs of staff Rhonda Foxx (Fmr., Rep. Adams) and Joi Chaney (Sen. Gillibrand), such as on the HBCU Partners Act
- Bipartisan efforts reflect Scott's priorities, who has introduced legislation with Democratic Senators Booker and Coons on apprenticeships and HBCU/federal partnerships, respectively

Policy Positions and Areas of Focus

In addition to championing Scott's Opportunity Agenda, promotes fiscally conservative approaches to alleviate poverty and boost opportunity

Opportunity Zones – Supports tax incentives to encourage investment in low-income areas

- Helped Scott include in 2017 tax bill
- She and Scott have interacted with rappers in favor of this approach including Chance the Rapper, Charlamagne the God, and TI
- As leader of Scott's Opportunity agenda, also champions school choice, apprenticeship, and job training legislation

Racial Justice – Efforts underpinned by racial justice goals

- Scott's office reportedly heavily influenced by the police shooting in N. Charleston
- Scott credits her for the highest GOP participation in the annual Selma, Alabama Bloody Sunday walk in
- DeCasper tweeted in support of Scott's Jan. 2019 op-ed condemning the GOP's silence in instances of racist comments, such as Rep. King's statements on white nationalism

Criminal Justice – Advocates for reforms that aid racial justice in policing

- Encouraged Scott to visit South Carolina prisons to better understand human impact of criminal justice system
- Supports increased use of bodycams

HBCU Funding – Bipartisan HBCU efforts

- Collaborated with Democratic chiefs on HBCU Partners Act, which mandates federal agencies to support HBCU participation in their programs

Diversity Among Hill Staff – Diversity across the aisle

- At first skeptical of being the "echo chamber" for the value of diversity, is now a champion
- Supported Pelosi's House Diversity Initiative
- Advises both Democrats and Republicans

Core Communities

Network reflects dual commitment to conservatism and supporting the African American community

GOP Establishment – Positive rapport with spectrum of GOP and Trump-aligned actors

- Tweets suggest positive relationships with several GOP actors such as fmr. WH Press Sec. Sean Spicer and Sen. Shelby
- Strong reputation among Republican staffers
- Involved in chiefs-of-staff Bible study group with individuals such as fmr. chief of staff to Sen. McConnell Hunter Bates
- Former colleague Rich Dunn (Scott's former chief of staff) works for GOP campaign consulting firm FP1 Strategies
- Former colleague Kimberly Wallner (Scott's former LD) worked for Heritage Foundation until starting her own design firm in 2018

African American Hill Community – Bipartisan relationships with fellow Hill leaders

- Former Treasurer, Black Republican Congressional Staff Association
- Member, Black Women's Congressional Alliance
- Bipartisan policy efforts with other African American women who serve as chiefs of staff

Christian Community – Shared religious devotion with Scott and other Hill leaders

- Chiefs-of-staff Bible study group participant
- Both she and Scott are devout Christians

Speaking Engagements

Despite stated dislike for public speaking, participates in several forums about experience on Hill

- Speaker at Empower America Project Night to Honor Public Service, Sept. 2019
- Panelist at American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division Spring Conference on “Effecting Change Behind the Scenes: Insight into the role of a Hill Staffer,” May 2019
- Panelist at American Bar Association Spring Conference, “A View from the Hill-Afternoon at the US Capitol with special guests Senate Judiciary Chair Lindsey Graham and Congressman Joe Kennedy,” May 2019
- Policy panelist at Heritage National Coalition Of 100 Black Women, Inc. Day of Action and Advocacy, April 2019
- Panelist for PLEN (Public Leadership Education Network) + Women in Public Policy on “Women Transforming Capitol Hill,” January. 2019
- Panelist at Politico’s 6th Annual Women Rule Summit on “Leveraging Power for Lasting Impact,” Dec. 2018
- Panelist at She Rocks the Hill on “How I Got Here: Non-Elected Careers on Capitol Hill,” July 2018
- Panelist at RNC “Lead Right” event, March 2018
- Participant in Capitol Hill forum led by National Urban League SVP for Policy Don Cravins about lack of minority hiring in their senior staff positions, January 2017
- Speaker at The Ripon Society 39ers Group meeting, May 2016

Criticisms and Controversies

Sister Chelsea DeCasper

- Chelsea became Scott’s Office Manager in May 2015
- April 2015 article by Nate Hoffman entitled “Sen. Scott’s latest family hire tiptoes around ethics rules” discussed DeCasper’s sister being hired as her assistant in March 2015

Profiles Others Have Written

Articles about DeCasper’s path to and unique position on Capitol Hill

Rachel Rosenblit: [“3 Female Congressional Chiefs of Staff on How They Get it Done in D.C.”](#) Shondaland, March 2019

- Profile highlights 3 black women who serve as chiefs of staff (DeCasper, Rhonda Foxx, and Joi Chaney)

Emma DuMain: [“For Sen. Tim Scott and chief of staff Jennifer DeCasper, a close bond and ‘divine’ partnership.”](#) Post and Courier, May 2017

- Examines the bond between DeCasper and Sen. Scott

Nora Kelly: [“Jennifer DeCasper: The Chief of Staff Who Thinks Capitol Hill Is a Peaceful Place.”](#) The Atlantic, May 2015

- Provides insight into Casper’s demeanor and policymaking approach

Family Background

Inspired by parents’ sacrifice

- Said in an interview that her mother and father are the heroes she looks up to most
- Born to single mother at age 17, and father came into her life at 4 years old