



## A Few Key Members, Family Guide Pelosi

January 22, 2007

By Jennifer Yachnin and Tory Newmyer,  
Roll Call Staff

---

Credited with a long political memory and a fierce sense of loyalty, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has long relied on a close inner circle of advisers, most of them fellow Californians. Now, many of those individuals assert the newly elected leader is working to expand her reach as she seeks to secure her place in the top House seat.

"It's always been concentric circles," said Rep. George Miller (D), who chairs the Education and Labor Committee.

The California lawmaker, widely considered to be one of Pelosi's top advisers, asserts that while Pelosi looks to her inner sanctum during initial considerations, she consistently repeats the process, often looking to the Democratic Caucus Steering and Policy Committee, as well as the committee chairmen, for response before finalizing her plans.

"The Caucus is going to be the sounding board for a lot of these decisions," Miller added. "There's 233 moving pieces out here," he said in reference to the new Democratic majority. "You have to go to a zillion different places with what you want to do."

House Judiciary Chairman John Conyers (D-Mich.), who is not part of Pelosi's inner circle, confirmed that the Speaker is reaching out more to senior Democrats, an effort that also may prove beneficial as Pelosi aims to consolidate power within the party and keep Members in line in the 110th Congress.

"She's got a core group that she's come to rely on ... but she reaches out to the chairmen of committees," Conyers said. "All the issues we're working on, we try to give her a heads up on it. ... It seems to work pretty well. In the old days, chairmen did their own thing and incidentally informed the Speaker, which wasn't terribly efficient."

Another top Pelosi confidant, Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), went further, arguing that Pelosi, in only a few short weeks, has adapted the role of the Speaker in a manner not previously seen in the House, reaching out to all branches of the Caucus.

"The Speaker has the best political mind I've ever seen," Murtha asserted. "She asks for advice from a wide spread" of Members, then goes to specific lawmakers with expertise in any given area for specific advice.

"Tip O'Neill (D-Mass.) could not be Speaker today. He would have to change," added Murtha, who has managed Pelosi's leadership campaigns, first for Minority Whip and then

Minority Leader, as she has risen through the Democratic ranks. In an act that many observers saw as a demonstration of that loyalty, Pelosi backed Murtha in his ultimately unsuccessful bid for Majority Leader against Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.).

Regardless of Pelosi's seemingly expanding circle, however, many Democratic observers say she nevertheless continues to turn most often to her close allies, including other Californians such as Reps. Anna Eshoo and Henry Waxman, who chairs the Oversight and Government Reform panel, as well as Reps. Ed Markey (Mass.) and Rosa DeLauro (Conn.), raising doubts among some Democrats about her broader outreach efforts.

"There's certainly a concern in the Caucus that she sometimes has too insular of a world and all of the people she's close to share the same viewpoint," said one senior Democratic aide, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

But Rep. Mike Thompson (D-Calif.), another Pelosi ally, asserts: "She doesn't need a lot of advice. ... She has a grasp on things far greater than most people imagine." He added: "I think she has close friends that she listens to a lot, but she's open."

Although some Democrats contend that Thompson, a member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition, serves in part as Pelosi's liaison to that group, Thompson asserts he plays no special role. "She understands that every member of our Caucus brings something to the picnic," he said.

In addition to fellow lawmakers, Democratic observers point to Pelosi's family as a key resource for the first-ever female Speaker.

"You can't go wrong saying she relies heavily on her family," Murtha acknowledged.

Although Pelosi often refers to her children and grandchildren — and was flanked by many of her grandchildren during her election to the Speaker's office earlier this month — confidants, including Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.), note that the Speaker's family, including her husband, Paul, remains largely in the background.

"She is very devoted to her family and gets great strength from them," Lofgren said. "You'll never see Paul Pelosi expounding on an issue."

Among Pelosi's five children, daughter Christine is perhaps the most entwined in politics as a former aide to Rep. John Tierney (D-Mass.) who has traveled on campaign swings with her mother and most recently directed a 2006 training camp for Congressional candidates, managing a series of candidate training sessions around the country.

Another daughter, Alexandra, also has made her mark in politics, focusing on presidential campaigns first in her 2002 film "Journeys with George" and then in 2004 with "Diary of a Political Tourist," which followed Democratic presidential candidates. Her newest film, "Friends of God: Road Trip With Alexandra Pelosi," focuses on the evangelical community.

Within the California lawmaker's Congressional office, Democratic sources also cite a slew of aides responsible in part for supporting Pelosi's success in recent years.

Heading the operation is John Lawrence, a veteran Capitol Hill aide known for his policy expertise — he spent more than 30 years working in Miller's office — who took the reins as chief of staff in fall 2005 in the then-Minority Leader's office.

Another veteran of more than 30 years on the Hill, Deputy Chief of Staff George Kundanis, is responsible for the floor. Kundanis, who has held a place of distinction on Roll Call's elite

Fabulous 50 staff list for nearly 20 years, has worked for every Democratic leader since Rep. Tom Foley (Wash.) in 1976.

Also integral to the Pelosi operation are Dean Aguillen, who serves as director of Member services and works with the large crop of freshman Democratic lawmakers, and Lorraine Miller, intergovernmental relations director, who concurrently serves as president of the D.C. branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Miller, who previously worked under then-Speaker Jim Wright (D-Texas) and Foley, returned to the Hill in 2001 to join Pelosi's team.

Another confidante to the Speaker, Terri McCullough, heads the Californian's personal Congressional office. A one-time spokeswoman to Pelosi, McCullough returned to the Hill in 2003 as Pelosi's director of outreach, moving up to her current post a few months later.

Also among Pelosi's closest aides are Brian Wolff, recently tapped to be the new executive director at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, moving up from his post as deputy executive director in charge of finance in the previous cycle, and Jennifer Crider, who moves from the Speaker's office to run the DCCC's communications shop. In the meantime, Brendan Daly, also considered a top Pelosi aide, will continue to manage communications from the Speaker's office.

Only a handful of Pelosi's inner orbit of advisers are working on K Street. In part, that's because, like Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), the Speaker has seen remarkably few of her staffers go on to heavy-hitting lobbying jobs downtown. Two notable exceptions are Judy Lemons and George Crawford, each of whom served Pelosi as chief of staff.

Lemons had a long track record in Pelosi's San Francisco district before Pelosi herself ever held the seat, working for then-Rep. Phil Burton (D) until his death in 1983, and then his wife, Sala, who replaced him until her death in 1987. After Pelosi won the seat, Lemons helped her set up on Capitol Hill, serving as her top aide for the next 15 years. She has been flying under the radar for the past few years — holding a gig as a solo consultant for a handful of San Francisco-area nonprofits — but Lemons this month signed up to lobby for K Street giant Dutko Worldwide.

Lemons' successor in Pelosi's office, George Crawford, is now a lobbyist at King & Spalding, the Atlanta-based law firm.

Aside from the pair of staff alums, Pelosi's closest friends downtown are mostly former colleagues who made up a tight circle of then-House Members she joined when she came to town. **One group — former Democratic Reps. Marty Russo (III.),** Tom Downey (N.Y.) and Leon Panetta (Calif.), in addition to now-Sens. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) — used to gather on Tuesday nights for dinner, often at Italian restaurants downtown.

**"That's how we got to know each other," said Russo, now a top lobbyist for Cassidy & Associates.**

She also counts Kip O'Neill, a lobbyist at O'Neill, Athy and Casey, and longtime House staffer and Washington Council Ernst & Young lobbyist Dick Meltzer among her closest friends in town.

Those relationships, too, span decades. O'Neill, son of the late former Speaker Tip O'Neill (D-Mass.), got to know Pelosi in the late 1970s while campaigning with his father on the West Coast. Both children of prominent urban politicians, O'Neill said they share "a kindred souls sort of background."

Meltzer, who spent 25 years on the Hill, recently returned to serve as an aide to Pelosi's transition team.

But those close to the Speaker said she maintains bonds formed during her earliest days in national politics as personal friendships, preferring to seek input on legislative matters from members of her own Caucus. **"She only asks us when she thinks we can add something, because we've worked in the legislative arena together, and she knows we'll give her the unvarnished truth," Russo said.**

Others agreed, noting that Pelosi often will dial corporate CEOs when she wants to talk policy, rather than hashing issues out with their delegates on K Street. "She calls on them directly to solicit their advice," Crawford said.

O'Neill said the tactic is in part an adjustment to the fact that Democratic ranks downtown have been thinned dramatically by 12 years of GOP rule.

"There isn't a core group of Democratic lobbyists in corporate offices to advance the agenda, so she has to go over their heads," he said. "It's a new world for Democratic leadership."

