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# The Chamber of Partisanship

An Investigation Into the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's  
Dense Web of Political Connections

## **Acknowledgments**

This report was written by the Chamber Watch division of Public Citizen. It was researched by Dan Dudis, former Director of the Chamber Watch project, and overseen by Lisa Gilbert, Public Citizen's Vice President of Legislative Affairs.

## **About Public Citizen**

Public Citizen is a national non-profit organization with more than 400,000 members and supporters. We represent consumer interests through lobbying, litigation, administrative advocacy, research, and public education on a broad range of issues including consumer rights in the marketplace, product safety, financial regulation, worker safety, safe and affordable health care, campaign finance reform and government ethics, fair trade, climate change, and corporate and government accountability.

## **About Chamber Watch**

Chamber Watch is a project of Public Citizen. Its mission is to raise awareness about the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the central role it plays in the corporate capture of our democracy.



Public Citizen's Congress Watch  
215 Pennsylvania Ave. S.E  
Washington, D.C. 20003  
P: 202-546-4996  
F: 202-547-7392  
<http://www.citizen.org>

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## I. Introduction

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce styles itself as the voice for the American business community in Washington, D.C. But under President Tom Donohue, the group has become increasingly partisan.<sup>1</sup> A prior Public Citizen report<sup>2</sup> documented that in 2016, 100 percent of the Chamber's near \$30 million in spending to influence elections benefited Republican candidates. This was a first for the group, which in past years had spent token amounts in support of Democratic candidates as well.<sup>3</sup>

In this report, we examine the political and industry ties of Chamber staff, which like its spending, is markedly partisan, and overwhelmingly connected to the Republican Party and conservative groups.

## II. Executive Summary

In our analysis of 380 current and former employees of the Chamber as of November 2017 we identified 157 who previously worked in positions that could be characterized as political in nature. Of these, 145 worked for Republican entities and principals and only 14 worked for Democratic entities and principals. (Two worked for both.) This means more than 90 percent of Chamber employees who previously worked in political jobs worked for Republicans and fewer than 10 percent for Democrats.

Among organizations feeding employees to the Chamber were the Republican Party, Republican House members and U.S. Senators, Republican White Houses and Cabinet secretaries, Republican presidential transition teams, Republican convention committees, Republican inaugural committees, state & local Republican elected officials, Republican campaign committees, Republican and conservative political action committees (PACs), conservative outside groups, conservative fundraising and lobbying firms, and conservative media.

We found that:

- 145 current or former Chamber employees have worked for at least one right-leaning entity. In comparison, just 14 Chamber employees worked for a Democratic Party- or liberal-leaning entity.
- 73 different Republican and conservative entities have fed employees to the Chamber.
- Current or former Chamber employees worked for 72 GOP U.S. House members and 47 GOP U.S. senators.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheryl Gay Stolberg, *Pugnacious Builder of the Business Lobby*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (June 1, 2013), <http://nyti.ms/2h91C9x>.

<sup>2</sup> Grace Aylmer, *The Republican Party and the Chamber of Secrets*, PUBLIC CITIZEN (Dec. 7, 2016), <http://bit.ly/2stqD2W>.

<sup>3</sup> *U.S. Chamber of Commerce Targeted Candidates, 2014 Cycle*, CENTER FOR RESPONSIVE POLITICS, <http://bit.ly/2ziSdag> (viewed on Nov. 6, 2017).

### III. Methodology

To construct a database of current and former Chamber employees, we searched LinkedIn in November 2017 for profiles that included current or former employment with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. We did not include interns, non-Chamber employees who served on Chamber committees or those who worked at the U.S. Chamber Foundation, the group's charitable arm.

Shortly thereafter, we checked this list against people the Chamber currently lists on its website as members of its leadership,<sup>4</sup> issue experts,<sup>5</sup> or press contacts,<sup>6</sup> and added any of these people who were not already captured by our LinkedIn search. In total, our database contains 361 current Chamber employees and 19 former Chamber employees.

For the 380 current or former Chamber employees in our database, we scrutinized their LinkedIn profiles and/or Chamber website biographies to determine if they had ever had a prior political job,<sup>7</sup> with which party they had been affiliated<sup>8</sup> (Republican, Democratic, or independent<sup>9</sup>), the entities<sup>10</sup> for which they worked, what their prior roles had been, and the political figures for whom they had worked.<sup>11</sup>

Many employees held jobs for entities, such as those within the executive branch, that are not officially partisan in nature. In the case of executive branch positions, we only counted political appointees and identified the political affiliation as that of the party of the president in power.

LinkedIn profiles and Chamber website biographies were not always complete, and where possible, we supplemented them with publicly available information relating to prior or subsequent employment.

Lastly, there are of course some Chamber employees who do not have a LinkedIn profile and information about their past employment was otherwise unavailable. Due to these limitations, our

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<sup>4</sup> Leadership, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, <http://uscham.com/2j8FaBM> (viewed on Nov. 6, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Issue Experts, U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, <http://uscham.com/2zr78Pl> (viewed on Nov. 6, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Press Contacts, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, <http://uscham.com/2iFjp3I> (viewed on Nov. 6, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> For those who worked in the executive branch, we only considered these jobs political if they were not civil service positions. We looked at several factors in order to make this determination including job title and dates of service.

<sup>8</sup> A few Chamber employees worked for politicians who changed parties such as Sen. Arlen Specter, Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, or Gov. Lincoln Chafee. In these instances, we characterized the employees' political affiliations based on the party to which their political patron belonged at the time s/he was employing them.

<sup>9</sup> One Chamber employee had a prior political job working for independent former Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Chafee.

<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this report, "entity" refers to the political organization or structure within which someone worked. It includes the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, the White House, various federal agencies, the federal judiciary, state legislatures, state executive offices, political campaigns, various outside partisan groups, political parties, various partisan lobbying or fundraising firms, and partisan media outlets.

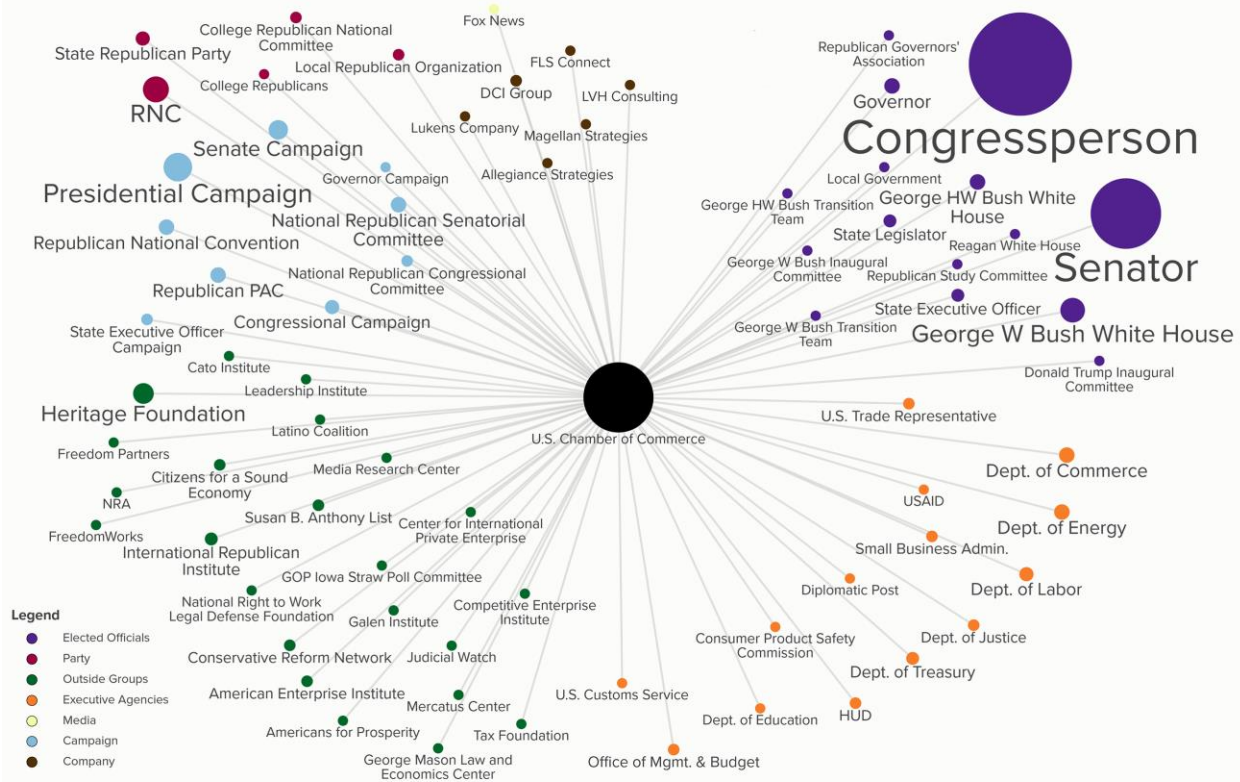
<sup>11</sup> For those who worked in the executive branch, we considered the politically appointed head of the agency to be the political figure for whom they worked unless they worked in the White House or headed up the agency in which case we considered the President to be the political figure for whom they worked. For example, we would classify an Assistant Secretary of Energy as having worked for the Energy Secretary but the Energy Secretary as having worked for the president. For those in the legislative branch who worked for a committee rather than a member, we considered the political figure for whom they worked to be the senior member on the committee from their party.

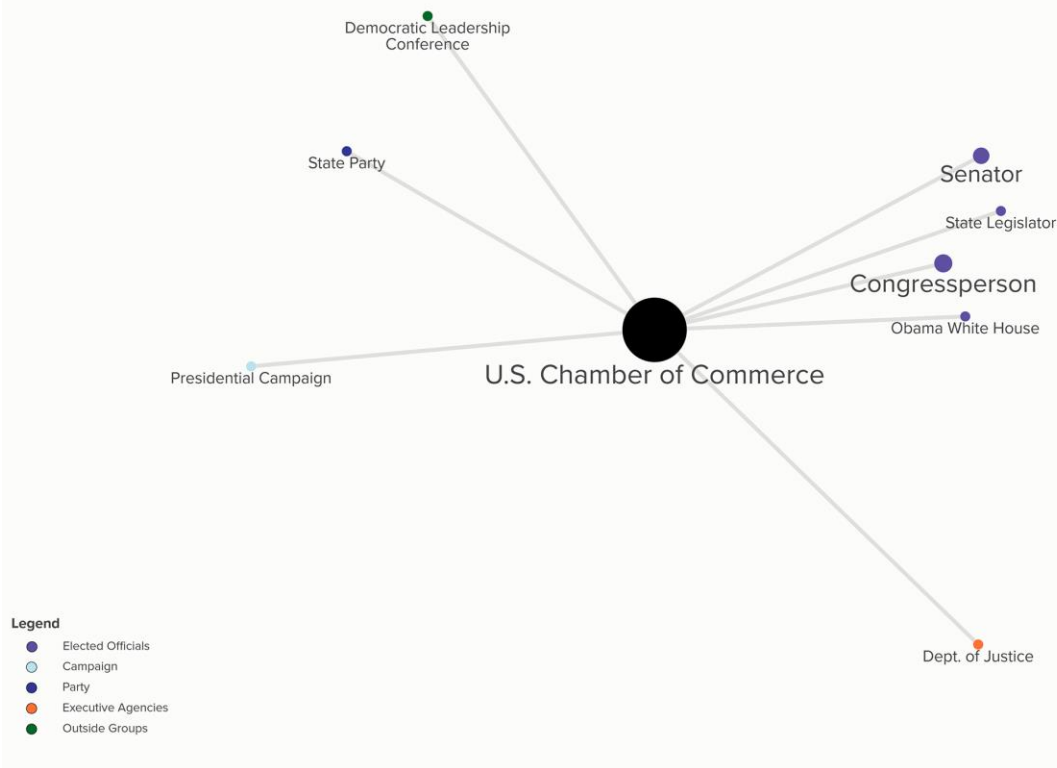
database undercounts the number of political connections. But there is no reason to believe that the pattern of these connections is affected by the gaps in our data.

#### IV. Nearly All of the Chamber's Employees With Political Backgrounds Worked for GOP-Aligned Entities

Of employees whom we identified as holding previous political positions, we counted 145 who previously worked for entities or principals on the political right, having worked for a total of 73 Republican or conservative employers. [Figure 1] In contrast, just 14 current or former Chamber employees in our database worked for Democratic or liberal entities, having worked for a total of 8 such employers. [Figure 2]

**Figure 1: Republican or Conservative Entities for Which U.S. Chamber Employees Have Worked**



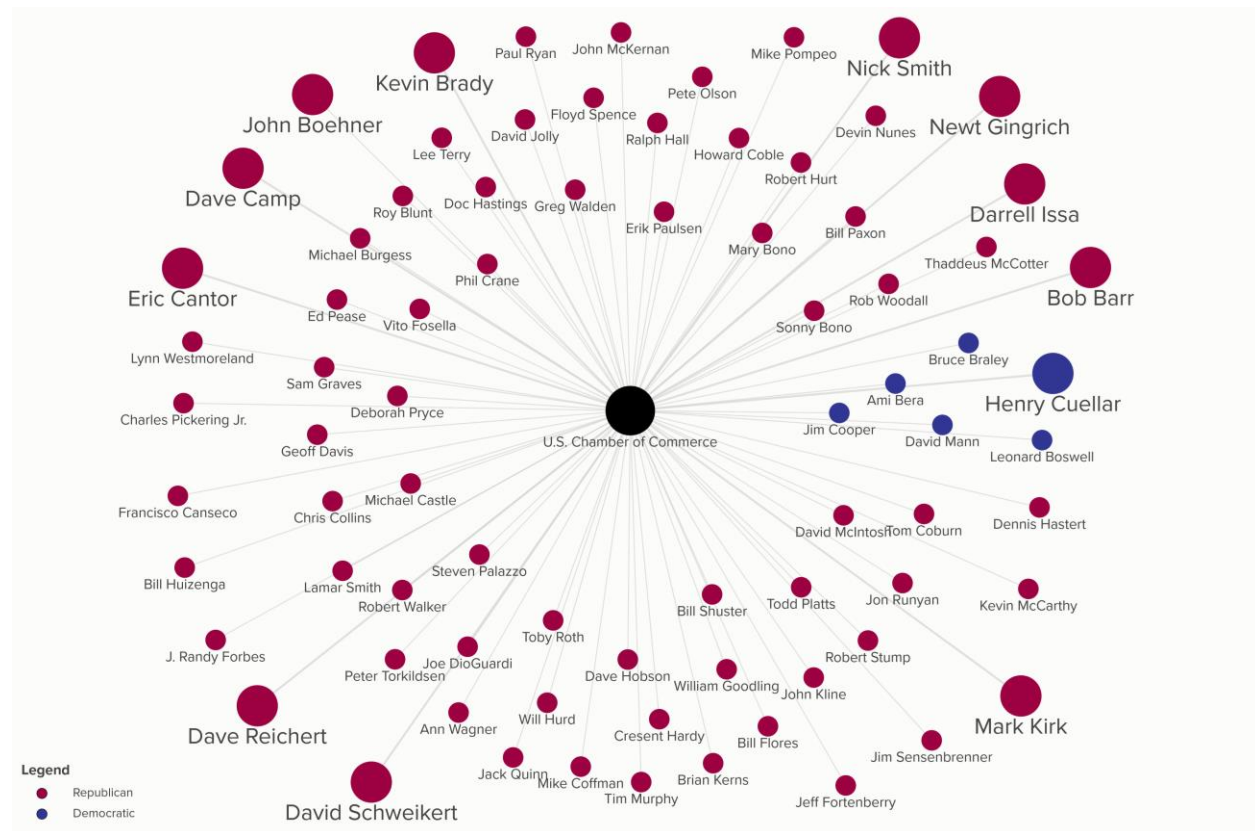
**Figure 2: Democratic or Liberal Entities for Which U.S. Chamber Employees Have Worked**

Among the leading entities feeding employees to the Chamber are Republican members of Congress. A total of 72 current or former Republican U.S. House members and 47 current or former Republican U.S. Senators employed those who have worked for the Chamber. Additionally, at least nine Chamber employees worked for Republican presidential candidates and 13 Chamber employees are connected to the RNC.

Other notable right-wing entities connected to the Chamber include the Heritage Foundation (nine employees) and various right wing groups affiliated with the Koch brothers, including Freedom Partners, Citizens for a Sound Economy, FreedomWorks, Americans for Prosperity, the Mercatus Center, and the George Mason Law and Economics Center (a total of seven connections).

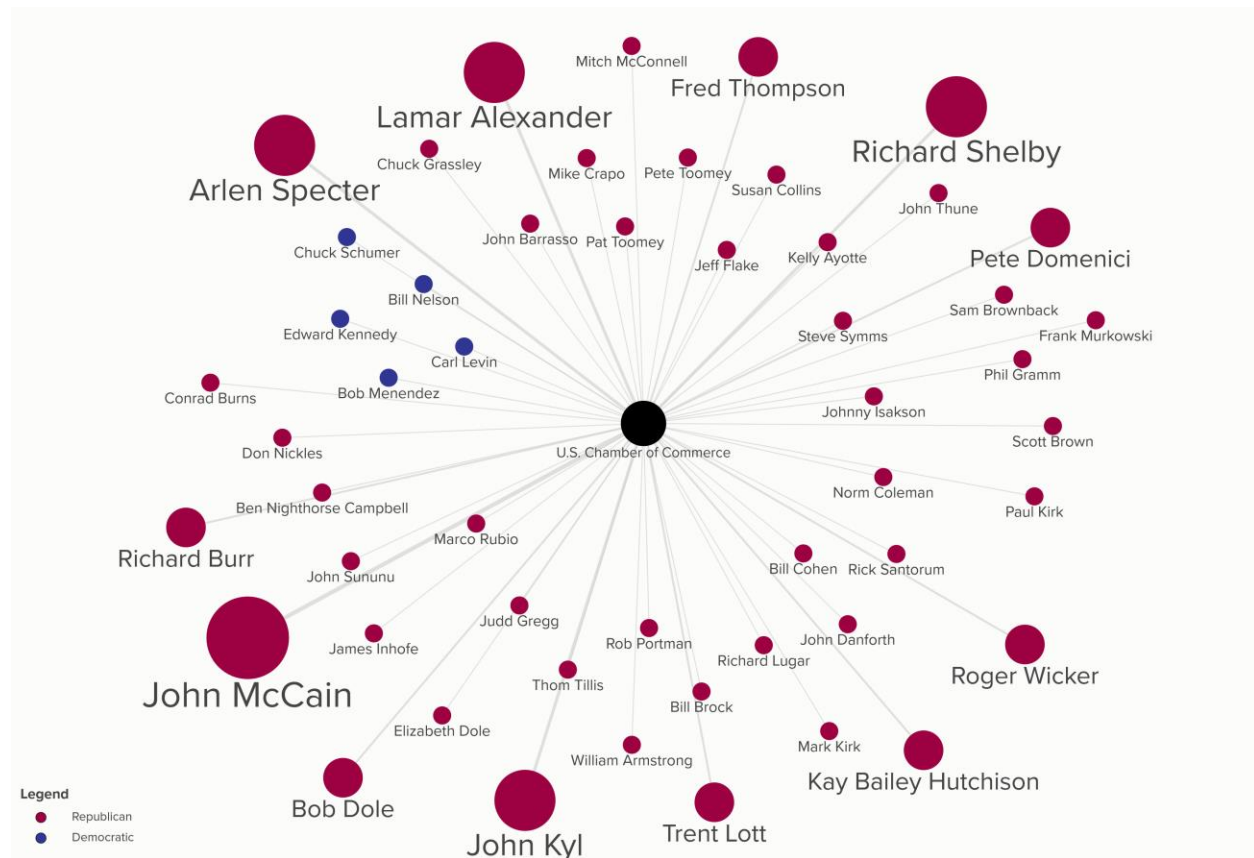
Twelve current or former members of Congress had at least two employees in common with the Chamber, and only one of those members was a Democrat. They are: former Rep. Bob Barr (R-Ga.), former Rep. and Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio), Rep. Kevin Brady (R-Texas), former Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.), former Rep. and Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.), Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas.), former Rep. and Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), former Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), Rep. Dave Reichert (R-Wash.), Rep. David Schweikert (R. Ariz.), and former Rep. Nick Smith (R-Mich.). The remaining 66 current or former congresspersons are connected to the Chamber by one employee, with only five having been Democratic members. [Figure 3]

### Figure 3: U.S. House Members Who Employed Chamber Employees



With respect to the Senate, 47 current or former Republican senators and five current or former Democratic senators are connected to the Chamber by one or more employees. [Figure 4] These include Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), with four connections, followed by Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), former Sen. and Minority Whip John Kyl (R-Ariz.), Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), and former Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), with three connections each.



**Figure 4: U.S. Senators Who Employed Chamber Employees**

## V. Conclusion

Under President Tom Donohue, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has become increasingly partisan in doling out the trade association's vast campaign contributions.

This report makes clear just how partisan the Chamber has become by analyzing another indicator, the revolving door connections between the Chamber and Republican organizations, Republican elected officials and conservative organizations,

The Chamber's hyperpartisanship does not match the overall orientation of the business community, which is far more bipartisan in its political contributions, its lobbying hires and policy orientation. Indeed, when the Chamber's staff is so dominated by people with a right-wing political background, one wonders about the extent to which the Chamber's purported goal advancing the preferred policies of the business community is being subordinated to advancing the preferred policies of the Republican Party and those in its sphere.



**Appendix: Current and Former Chamber Employees With Past Politically Affiliated Jobs**

First Name	Last Name	Current Chamber Employee?*	Prior Politically Affiliated Jobs	Party Affiliation of Past Jobs
Maddison	Abboud	Y	Americans for Prosperity; GOP Iowa Straw Poll Committee	R
Kelly	Anderson	Y	Senate	R; D
Yvette Betance	Arantxa	Y	Heritage Foundation	R
Alyssa	Arceneaux	Y	National Republican Congressional Committee; DCI Group	R
Sara	Armstrong	Y	Party; White House	R
Haley	Ast	N	House	R
Christina	Atchley	Y	Romney for President; Strickland for Congress	R
Rob	Bartnickack	Y	RNC; House	R
John	Baselice	Y	Senate	R
Michael	Billet	Y	American Enterprise Institute	R
Ron	Bird	Y	DOL	R
Ryan	Bishop	Y	House	R
Camden	Bisson	Y	Senate; Jeb Bush for President	R
Jodi Hanson	Bond	N	Department of Energy	R
Neil	Bradley	Y	Conservative Reform Network; House; Republican Study Committee	R
Rachel	Brand	N	DOJ; George W Bush Transition Team	R
Kasie	Brill	Y	Senate	D
Veronica	Brown	Y	House	R
Andrew	Burk	Y	Freedom Partners	R
Dan	Byers	Y	White House; House	R
Laura Crist	Chambers	Y	House; Senate	R
Joe	Chaudoin	Y	America Rising PAC (GOP PAC); Senate; House; College RNC	R
Marjorie	Chorlins	Y	Senate; Department of Commerce	R
Lily Fu	Claffee	Y	DOJ; Treasury; Commerce	R
Tom	Collamore	Y	Fred Thompson for President; Department of Commerce; George HW Bush transition team; White House; George HW Bush for President	R
Kara	Conrad	Y	Senate	R
Katharine	Cooksey	Y	House	R
Charli	Coon	N	Heritage Foundation; House; Senate	R
Kevin	Courtois	Y	House; Senate	R
Katelynne	Cox	Y	House	R
Jordan	Crenshaw	Y	NRA; VA Attorney General's Office	R
Frank	Cullen Jr.	Y	House	R
Brian	Daner	Y	Senate; House	R
Akshai	Datta	N	House	D
Tim	Day	Y	House	R
Stacy	Day	Y	Scott Walker for America; Our American Revival (Scott Walker 527 group); Republican Governors' Association; Tommy Thompson for Senate	R
Allison	Dembeck	Y	Senate; House	R
Vartan	Djihanian	Y	House; Tommy Thompson for Senate; Joe DioGuardi for Senate; Bruce O'Donoghue for Congress	R
Mercedes	Dobay	Y	Republican Party of Pennsylvania; Senate	R
Poppy	Doolan	Y	Conn. Senate	R

First Name	Last Name	Current Chamber Employee?*	Prior Politically Affiliated Jobs	Party Affiliation of Past Jobs
Hallie	Duenkel	Y	Lukens Company (GOP political consulting firm)	R
Erin	Dwyer	Y	White House	R
Scott	Eckart	Y	DLC	D
Allison	Ehrlich	Y	Senate	D
Ron	Eidshaug	Y	Governor of NY	R
Scott	Eisner	Y	Senate; International Republican Institute	R
Rob	Engstrom	Y	RNC; Newt Gingrich for Congress	R
Stephen	Eule	Y	Department of Energy; House; Heritage Foundation; New Jersey Governor	R
Chris	Eyler	Y	Senate; House	R
Page	Faulk	Y	Consumer Product Safety Commission; Senate	R
Courtney Sanders	Felts	Y	White House; Senate	R
Macon	Field	Y	Magellan Strategies (GOP elections firm)	R
Colin	Finnegan	Y	DCI Group (GOP lobbying firm)	R
Erica	Flint	N	House; Senate	R
Sue	Forrester	Y	RNC; FLS Connect (GOP fundraising firm)	R
JD	Foster	Y	Senate; White House; Tax Foundation; House; Treasury; OMB; Heritage Foundation	R
Laura	Garcia	Y	RNC; John McCain for President; Latino Coalition (right wing Latino group); Bush/Cheney 04; 2004 Republican National Convention; SBA	R
Derek	Gianino	Y	Romney for President; David McIntosh/Hoosiers for Freedom PAC; Bush-Cheney 04	R
Roger	Gibboni	Y	George Mason U Law and Economics Center; Senate	R
Kyle	Gibson	Y	Cato Institute	R
John	Gonzales	Y	House; Senate; Bush/Quayle 92	R
Alex	Goodman	Y	House; Pam Bondi for Attorney General	R
Ashlee	Grover	Y	Heritage Foundation; Competitive Enterprise Institute; FreedomWorks	R
Cristopher	Guith	Y	Department of Energy; House; Bush-Cheney 04	R
Sean	Hackbarth	Y	Senate Republican Conference; Friends of Fred Thompson	R
Justin	Hakes	Y	National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation	R
Carol	Hallett	Y	United States Customs Service; U.S. Embassy to the Bahamas; California State Assembly	R
Moore	Hallmark	Y	House; Cobb County (GA) Republican Party	R
Karen	Harbert	Y	DOE; USAID; International Republican Institute	R
Emily	Harlan	Y	Allegiance Strategies (right-leaning lobbying group); Rep. Todd Platts; Rep. John Boehner	R
Sean	Heather	Y	State Government	R
Neil	Herrington	Y	USTR	R

First Name	Last Name	Current Chamber Employee?*	Prior Politically Affiliated Jobs	Party Affiliation of Past Jobs
David	Hirschmann	Y	House	R
Benjamin	Hirsh	Y	House	R
Cassie Ann	Hodges	Y	House	R
Jack	Howard	Y	White House; Senate; House	R
Rob	Hoyt	Y	New Hampshire Republican State Committee	R
Ebony	Hunter	Y	Heritage Foundation	R
Stacey	Hutchinson	Y	Conservative Reform Network; House; RNC	R
Randy	Johnson	Y	House; DOL	R
Joe	Johnson	Y	Mercatus Center	R
Allison	Kajs	Y	Judicial Watch	R
Mary	Kane	N	Candidate for MD Lieutenant Governor	R
Sarah	Keller	Y	Senate; McCain for President	R
Patrick	Kilbride	Y	USTR	R
Harold	Kim	Y	White House; Senate	R
John	Kirchner	Y	Republican Party of Minnesota	R
Matt	Koch	Y	White House; Department of Energy; House	R
William	Kovacs	Y	House	D
Josh	Kram	Y	Hillary Clinton for President 08; Alaska Democratic Party	D
Blair Holmes	Latoff	Y	RNC; Senate	R
Steve	Lehotsky	Y	DOJ	R
Matthew	Letourneau	Y	Senate; Loudon County Board of Supervisors	R
Alan	Lu	Y	Senate	R
Rolf	Lundberg	N	Senate	R
Jeff	Lungren	Y	Galen Institute (right-leaning healthcare think tank); White House; House	R
Steve	Lutes	Y	Franklin County GOP; House	R
Michael	Marinaccio	Y	House; Party; Heritage Foundation; Senate	R
Jim	Martin	Y	John McCain for President; National Republican Senatorial Committee; National Republican Congressional Committee	R
Marissa	Martinez	Y	House	R
Stephen	McAllister	Y	Senate; Rhode Island Governor	R; I
John	McKernan	Y	House; Governor of Maine	R
Lisa	McLean	Y	House	R
Catherine	Mellor	Y	House	R
Ryan	Meyers	Y	Senate; Department of Treasury	R
Carolyn	Morris	Y	VA State Senate	R
Nathan	Morris	Y	Senate	R
Jack	Morton	N	House	R
John	Murphy	Y	International Republican Institute; Center for International Private Enterprise	R
Rob	Noel	Y	Senate; Marco Rubio's Reclaim America PAC; Pawlenty for President; Tim Pawlenty's Freedom First PAC	R
Patrick	O'Connor	Y	National Republican Senatorial Committee; The Foreign Policy Initiative; LVH Consulting (GOP fundraiser); House	R

First Name	Last Name	Current Chamber Employee?*	Prior Politically Affiliated Jobs	Party Affiliation of Past Jobs
Cheryl	Oldham	Y	White House; Department of Education	R
Brian	O'Shea	Y	House	R
Jared	Parks	Y	Department of Commerce	R
Courtney	Paul	Y	House	R
Mike	Pepe	Y	RNC	R
Samantha	Petraglia	Y	Senate; RNC; 2016 Republican National Convention; Kasich for Ohio; Ohio Department of Education	R
Warren	Postman	Y	Massachusetts State Senate	D
Lauren	Puzder	Y	House; Media Research Center; Heritage Foundation; Susan B Anthony List; Leadership Institute	R
Tom	Quaadman	Y	House	R
Eryn	Quinn	Y	House	R
Sean	Redmond	Y	DOL; George W Bush Inaugural Committee; Bush/Cheney 2000; 2000 Republican National Convention; Citizens for a Sound Economy (Koch-backed group)	R
Scott	Reed	Y	Bob Dole for President; RNC; HUD	R
Michael	Ridings	Y	Senate; House	R
Kerry	Rom	Y	Senate; National Republican Senatorial Committee	R
Kristyn	Royster	Y	Senate; Fox News	R
Stephanie	Ryska	Y	College Republican National Committee	R
Sean	Sahlhoff	Y	House	R
Alan	Sale	Y	House	D
Adam	Salerno	Y	Massachusetts Governor's Office	R
Robert	Schroder	Y	House	R
Halle	Schweikert	Y	Senate	R
Kristina	Sesek	Y	Republican Party of Wisconsin; House	R
Hemal	Shah	Y	American Enterprise Institute	R
Maggie	Sheely	Y	House	R
Lana	Skelo	Y	House	D
Cholly	Smith	N	House; Mark Kirk for Senate	R
Glenn	Spencer	Y	DOL; RNC; National Republican Senatorial Committee; Citizens for a Sound Economy (Koch-backed)	R
Christine	Stowe	Y	Senate	D
Thomas	Sullivan	Y	Small Business Administration; NFIB; Bipartisan Policy Center	R
Kara	Sutton	Y	House	R
Joyprada	Swain	Y	House	R
Caroline	Swann	Y	RNC; Department of Commerce; White House; HUD	R
Ben	Taylor	Y	House	R
Ketan	Thakkar	Y	White House	D
Clark	Thomason	Y	Senate	R
Amy	Travieso	Y	House	D
Jake	Tyner	Y	House	R
Jona	Van Deun	Y	RNC; White House	R
Michael	Viviano	Y	Susan B. Anthony List; Heritage Foundation; House	R
Vincent	Voci	Y	John Chapman for Congress; Scott Brown for Senate; Senate	R
Mia	Walton	Y	White House; OMB	R

First Name	Last Name	Current Chamber Employee?*	Prior Politically Affiliated Jobs	Party Affiliation of Past Jobs
Agnes	Warfield	Y	RNC; Senate	R
Andrew	Weller	Y	Senate; House	R
Caroline Rose	Westerman	Y	College Republicans	R
Garrett	Workman	Y	Senate; the Atlantic Council	R
Christian	Zur	Y	Senate; House	R; D

\* As of November 2017