People

Photographs by Chet Susslin

Chris Campbell
The Senate Finance Committee’s majority staff director prepares for a showdown on trade.

When I meet Chris Campbell in his modest office in Hart, the Senate Finance Committee is bracing itself for the biggest trade policy fight in decades—a showdown likely to include a vote on whether to give the president the authority to fast-track global trade agreements. As the committee’s new majority staff director—responsible for coordinating the Republican agenda on tax, trade, and health policy—and the right-hand man to Chairman Orrin Hatch, Campbell will be in the thick of it. The biggest projects on Campbell’s docket are tax reform and getting a mutual agreement between the parties on trade; specifically, he’d like to see a fast-tracked version of the Trans-Pacific Partnership passed. “We’re becoming more anticompetitive as a country,” he says. He believes TPP would help remedy that if passed. (It would also be the largest trade deal in history, involving some 40 percent of the world economy.) Campbell acknowledges the challenges to achieving that goal, including internal disputes across the aisle. “Trade is extremely difficult on the Democratic side,” he says. “We recognize that.”

But Campbell has never been one to let a little challenge get in his way. He grew
Jim Hock
Commerce Department

Just weeks after becoming chief of staff to Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker at the beginning of this year, Jim Hock found himself winging his way to India with his new boss to witness a landmark trade meeting between President Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Trade is one of the pillars of Pritzker’s “Open for Business” policy agenda—which Hock helped to shape in his previous job as senior adviser and director of public affairs at Commerce.

Before joining the department in August 2013, Hock, 45, cofounded the strategic-communications firm 463 Communications. He says he and Pritzker immediately hit it off when they met in 2013, exchanging stories from the private sector and ideas about how government could help businesses. Born in California and raised in New Jersey, Hock, who has also served as a spokesman for Sen. Dianne Feinstein, says that, after 21 years living in the state, he now considers himself a Virginian.

—Laura Ryan

CATHY KOCH first became interested in economics during a break in her undergraduate education, she says, when “my father—as a throwaway line—told me, ‘Just go take a course in economics... see if you like that.’” During the same period, the Pennsylvania native also took a job as a bank teller and customer-service representative in Princeton, New Jersey—where she assisted some economists who now know her as a peer. As Ernst & Young’s new Americas tax-policy leader, Koch will advise corporate clients on U.S. tax policy and policy developments across North, South, and Central America. It’s the latest step in a career that began with an internship at the Joint Committee on Taxation while she was working on her Ph.D. in economics at Georgetown University. Koch went on to hold senior positions at the Senate Finance Committee and General Electric. Directly before moving to Ernst & Young, she was Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid’s chief adviser on tax and economic policy.

—Laura Ryan
Lori Wallach

The advocate seeks “a trade policy that respects the fundamental tenets of American democracy.”

Lori Wallach was 27 and lobbying for food-safety improvements as a staff attorney for the consumer-advocacy group Public Citizen when she noticed that industry lawyers were routinely citing trade agreements as a reason to lower food-safety standards. That launched her on a mission to find out more. She wound up poring over a draft of the agreement that would establish the World Trade Organization—and coming to the conclusion that trade negotiations were affecting a whole lot more than just trade.

This “awakening,” as she calls it, kicked off two decades of work educating legislators and the public as the director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch. She and her 11-person team spend their days translating the arcane language of trade policy to help people understand it, tracking the outcomes of existing trade deals and measuring them against free-trade advocates’ claims, and lobbying Congress for what Wallach calls “a trade policy that respects the fundamental tenets of American democracy.”

“What I do is a combination of the ‘Dracula strategy’ and translation,” she says. “I translate what the terms mean and then basically drag into the sunshine what the real implications are. The thing is,” she adds, “just like Dracula, once exposed to the sunshine, the details of these agreements do not fare well.” Her efforts have made the 51-year-old perhaps the biggest thorn in the side of the free-trade movement—but if they want someone to blame, she says, they should talk to Big Food: “If the agro-business companies hadn’t gotten greedy about food-safety laws through the WTO and NAFTA, I’d still be working on fish inspection.”

Now, with Republicans in control of Congress and the Obama administration prioritizing trade deals—including the largest in decades, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which involves a dozen Pacific Rim countries—Wallach is gearing up for the fight of...
of tax issues—which was more
fun than it sounds, she says: “I
think a lot of people assume
that tax law is very dry, and all
you do is fill out tax returns.
That is sort of the myth of what
a tax lawyer does. The thing
that I actually liked about tax
law is that it’s actually pretty
creative.” The Ohio native’s
memories of the collegial cul-
ture at Steptoe & Johnson
helped distinguish it from the
other firms she was consider-
ing, she says: “It seems more
like a small Southern firm than
a big Washington firm.”

Laura Ryan