

LEGISLATIVE CONNECTIONS

Five law alumni serving in Connecticut government

BY BRIAN KOONZ
PHOTO AUTUMN DRISCOLL

QUINNIPIAC'S PRESENCE IN THE Connecticut Legislature increased with this year's class of freshmen state representatives. The newcomers joined two School of Law alumni who are widely regarded as potential candidates for governor in 2018.

There are now five School of Law graduates serving in Hartford: Senate Republican President Len Fasano, JD '84, R-North Haven; House Minority Leader Themis Klarides, JD '92, R-Derby; state Rep. Stephanie Cummings, JD '12, R-Waterbury; state Rep. Josh Elliott, JD '13, D-Hamden; and state Rep. Craig Fishbein '98, JD '01, R-Wallingford. Additionally, Klarides' sister, Nicole Klarides-Ditria, R-Seymour, also was elected to a House seat. She earned a business degree at Quinnipiac in 1990.

All of them experienced grueling, coffee-fueled, late-night sessions in search of a bipartisan state budget. Fasano and Themis Klarides, the state's top-ranking Republicans, want to change that routine. Klarides, the first woman in state history to lead the House Republicans, believes her education and advocacy have prepared her well to help direct Connecticut's future.

Is she considering a gubernatorial run? "I would love to continue serving this state in whatever way that I, the people of this state, and my colleagues think best, whether it's as governor or [GOP] leader," she said.

Fasano, a veteran of 17 years in the Senate, also is weighing a run for Connecticut's highest office. "You never say never, of course. Certainly, I would think about it," Fasano said. "But it's a huge family commitment. We'll see what happens in the next few months."

Fasano credited the law school's faculty for preparing graduates to help others in the courtroom, the Legislature or both. "One of the most important lessons that I learned was that policy is such a critical aspect of law," Fasano said.

"Perhaps you can go even further by changing policies that may need to be changed because they are arcane, or they need to be changed because we need to look at life differently."

Elliott, a freshman state representative and the lone Democrat in the group, has used his degree in business and politics. Whether he is navigating local planning and zoning regulations or the debate over turnpike tolls and infrastructure spending, he's learned how to

advance the causes his constituents care about most.

"Quinnipiac is really good at developing strong talent for what's needed in Connecticut in terms of knowledgeable law," said Elliott, owner of The Common Bond Market in Shelton, Connecticut, and Thyme & Season in Hamden.

"I was the president of the Society for Dispute Resolution, and a lot of what we focused on was negotiation, mediation and arbitration. There is a direct corollary between the skills I developed through the society and what I bring to Hartford," he said.

Cummings, another freshman state representative, was a member of the Society for Dispute Resolution as well. "At Quinnipiac, we learned to think across the aisle and to not take things personally," said Cummings, who also serves on Waterbury's Board of Aldermen. "Just because we're having a dispute over an issue, it doesn't mean I disagree with your intent."



Cummings noted that negotiation is one of the most important attributes for lawyers and legislators alike. "It's important to look at the totality of issues, not just one side of them. The practice of law really teaches you to argue the facts, not the emotions."

Fishbein, who once hired Cummings as an intern at his family's law practice, has witnessed the rewards of giving back in Hamden as well as Hartford as a freshman legislator. "I've taken in a number of Quinnipiac interns. I've seen the caliber of students increase during that time, including Stephanie. We worked in the trenches together," Fishbein said.

"I never intended to get into politics. But about five years after I graduated law school, I felt like I needed to get involved," he said.

"Now, I hold two positions—I'm on the Town Council in Wallingford and I'm a state representative. Quinnipiac had something to do with that."

Quinnipiac alumni and state legislators are shown inside the House Chamber at the Connecticut state Capitol. From left are state Rep. Josh Elliott, JD '13; state Rep. Stephanie Cummings, JD '12; state Rep. Craig Fishbein, '98, JD '01; Senate Republican President Len Fasano, JD '84; state Rep. Nicole Klarides-Ditria '90; and House Minority Leader Themis Klarides, JD '92.