

A Family Affair

A few folks, after a day at the capitol, go home together.



BY MORGAN CULLEN AND WENDY UNDERHILL

When it comes to family ties in the legislature, Wisconsin's Fitzgerald brothers get all the press. Jeff is the speaker of the Assembly, and Scott is the majority leader of the Senate.

They may be the best known, but a dozen or more family duos serve in other states. These teams—siblings, spouses and parent-child combos—are more common in states that have multi-member districts, such as New Hampshire, but it can happen anywhere.

NCSL has rounded up these “all in the family” sets and highlighted six below.

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NEW HAMPSHIRE Senator Andy Sanborn and Representative Laurie Sanborn



Andy and Laurie Sanborn are as tight as two people can be. They've been married for 25 years, worked together and shared hobbies, and now they serve in New Hampshire's General Court. He's a senator and she's a representative, both elected in 2010.

They are both fourth-generation New Hampshireites, and bigger boosters for the state are hard to find.

“It's a small state, but it has an ocean, mountain ranges, and is close to the city,” Andy says, “but it's also a state that embraces a traditional New England, Yankee way of life of mutual respect, honesty and trying to do more with less.” Without missing a beat, Laurie adds: “It's all about the people. We rely on each other.”

So they love each other and they love their state, but why run for office? “We believe that you can't complain if you don't take your turn,” says Andy.

Laurie elaborates. “You reach a point in life where you have enough life experience that you think you can contribute something back.”

FAMILY DUOS IN STATE LEGISLATURES

State	Name	Relationship
Arizona	Representatives Jim and Jerry Weiers	Brothers
Arkansas	Representatives Stephen and David Meeks	Brothers
Arkansas	Senator Jeremy and Representative Donna Hutchinson	Mother and son
Arkansas	Senators Jimmy and Gene Jeffress	Brothers
Maine	Representatives Michael and Alexander Willette	Father and son
Maine	Senator Richard and Representative Kimberly Rosen	Husband and wife
Michigan	Senator Mike and Representative Eileen Kowall	Husband and wife
Minnesota	Senator Ted and Representative Leon Lillie	Brothers
New Hampshire	Representatives Laura and Kyle Jones	Mother and son
New Hampshire	Representatives Carol and Dan McGuire	Husband and wife
New Hampshire	Senator Andy and Representative Laurie Sanborn	Husband and wife
North Dakota	Representatives Jerry and Scot Kelsh	Father and son
South Dakota	Senator Al and Representative David Novstrup	Father and son
Texas	Senator Eddie II and Representative Eddie III Lucio	Father and son
Wisconsin	Assemblyman Jeff and Senator Scott Fitzgerald	Brothers
Wyoming	Representatives David and Dan Zwonitzer	Father and son

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—REPRESENTATIVE JERRY KELSH, NORTH DAKOTA

Andy is more specific: “We are making sure that we have a business-friendly climate here. You can’t be pro job if you’re not pro business.”

They’ve been running a variety of small businesses for years—a sports bar, a real estate management firm, and a small-scale manufacturing enterprise—so it’s no surprise that after serving for just three weeks, Laurie put out an invitation for a brand new “House Business Caucus.” Soon it had 87 members and became the largest caucus in New Hampshire.

Both readily admit their public-private partnership gives them an advantage in the legislative world. Free time is spent strategizing about issues and messages. “We have two brains on every issue,” Andy says.

It’s all gone very smoothly so far—although there was some campaign confusion. “I did have people think that I was competing with my husband,” Laurie says.

NORTH DAKOTA

Representatives Jerry and Scot Kelsh



The Kelsh family has been involved in North Dakota politics for decades. Jerry Kelsh’s grandfather served in the Legislative Assembly in the 1920s, and he admits hearing some of those old stories inspired him to run for office. Jerry was elected to the Senate in 1984 and served until he was redistricted out of his seat in 2002. Six years later, he was elected again to the legislature.

Scot concentrated on his career as a real estate appraiser until his father encouraged him to run for an open House seat in 1996. He won

by 17 votes. “Since then, my reelection margins have been much more comfortable,” says Scot.

Today, father and son serve as House minority leader and caucus chair respectively. “Like all father-and-son relationships, we had our differences in our growing up years, but serving in the legislature has brought us closer together,” says Jerry.

The Kelsh family tradition shows signs of continuing. Andrew Kelsh, Scot’s son, is actively involved in his middle-school debate team and wants to follow the family into public service.

Although the Kelsh men don’t let politics interfere with their personal relationship, there can be challenges. Last year, Scot was overseeing a caucus meeting when he noticed his father talking on his cell phone. He let the entire caucus know cell phones were clearly not permitted—Kelsh family members included.

MICHIGAN

Senator Mike Kowall and Representative Eileen Kowall



On Election Night 2008, Mike and Eileen Kowall had two reasons to celebrate. Mike, who had given up his House seat six years earlier in an unsuccessful bid for a state Senate seat, had tried again and won the Senate seat.

And Eileen—always a key player in her husband’s campaigns—won his old House seat. Before running for the House, Eileen served five years on the Oakland Board of Commissioners.

In the three years since the election, Mike hasn’t experienced many downsides to serving alongside his wife, except for the long hours. “Even though we work in the same building together,” he says, “we are so busy that we don’t really get to see each other except on the weekends.”

Eileen likes discussing the issues and running ideas by her husband but admits that it can be hard to shut it off sometimes. “It feels like we just eat, sleep and breathe politics.”

Eileen was just reelected and is serving her second term in the House. She attributes her success to the support she has from Mike.

“It’s a team effort, and we know we can depend on each other and make each other laugh.”

At their joint victory celebration in 2008, Eileen gave her husband a white colonial wig to signify the Senate’s regal airs. Mike responded affectionately by letting her know he would treat her like any other member of the lower house—“with disdain.”

WYOMING

Representatives David and Dan Zwonitzer



Although David Zwonitzer was always interested in politics, it was his son who first plunged into elected office. Dan has been a member of the Wyoming House since 2005, after leaving a job in the governor's office. A year later his father, a small-business owner and auctioneer, was appointed to his seat.

Father and son have now served three elected terms together, and their personal and professional relationship is stronger than ever. David doesn't see any disadvantages to serving with his father.

"I think that we have always been cognizant of our relationship, and we don't let it overshadow our responsibility to the rest of the body or our constituents," he says.

Both Dan and David are Republicans, but they don't always vote the same way. They often use each other as a sounding board to develop a broader perspective on the issues. David says his father is more conservative, and they have "agreed to disagree," particularly on social issues.

They think the other House members appreciate their independent voting. Dan admits when he does cast an opposing vote he sometimes uses a much louder and commanding voice. It always draws a good laugh from the other members and the gallery.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Senator Al Novstrup and Representative David Novstrup



Senator Al Novstrup and Representative David Novstrup from South Dakota have been working side by side for 17 years running Thunder Road Family Fun Parks—batting cages, go-carts, mini-golf and bumper boats. David, Al's son, was 11

years old when he started and has been working 60-hour weeks in the summer ever since.

Apparently, the family business led straight to family politics. "You look at the opportunities you have as small-business people, and we started out helping the community, serving on committees and such," says David. "And then we found another way to help the community—by representing our town in Pierre."

David and Al live three miles apart in the northeastern town of Aberdeen. Family dinners are common, and "talking shop" most definitely mixes small-business concerns with big-picture policy and politics.

The two Novstrups generally agree on issues, and that's because they agree on values. "As small businessmen, we believe in free enterprise and capitalism and many of the traditional values of America," says Al. "That is our common foundation."

As with most family teams, the Novstrups faced skepticism when they first ran together in 2007, both for the House. (Al was elected first, in 2002, and moved to the Senate in 2008.) They were two of four candidates in their multi-member district, and the other two candidates complained it gave the family too much power.

The Novstrups' response: "If we're both elected we'll be two out of 105 legislators, so that's not much of a concentration. Besides, what if we were very powerful. Would that be a bad thing for Brown and McPherson counties and Aberdeen?"

Evidently, the voters thought not.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Representatives Carol and Dan McGuire



When Dan and Carol McGuire retired in 2005 in Washington state, they decided the next phase of their life would be best spent in New Hampshire. Why?

Politics.

"It's a lot of easier to get into politics in New Hampshire than anywhere else," says Carol.

By 2008, Carol had a seat in the state House of Representatives, and by 2010, they both did. In New Hampshire, they can both serve from the

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—REPRESENTATIVE DAN MCGUIRE,
NEW HAMPSHIRE

same address. Does this make them a "power team?"

"With 400 people in the New Hampshire House, there isn't a lot of power for any one person, or even for two," says Dan, a former electrical engineer, with a laugh. "We're all volunteers, really," compensated with a constitutionally mandated \$100 a year.

With limited power and no money in their team effort, what are the benefits?

"We can carpool, and I know where he is all the time," says Carol.

On a more serious note, she says, "I get insight into how a different committee works." She's chair of the Executive Departments and Administration Committee, and he's on the Finance Committee. Dan sees his job as "just getting the budget into shape."

Carol is "trying to simplify things. In the last two years, I've introduced a number of bills that would take out obsolete statutes." She's been successful in repealing a World War I-era Alien Registration statute and an anti-adultery law that hadn't been enforced in 50 years.

Dan says the only legislative disagreement so far came early on when "I put in a request to sit next to Carol, and she put in a request to *not* sit by me. She got her wish, but we both got excellent seats."

From her perspective, seating matters. "With 400 people, it's like high school. You don't know everybody by a long shot," and you can use your seat location to build new relationships and influence your neighbors.

Any other pluses to serving together?

"We can save on signs," says Dan, ever the fiscal conservative. "We can put out one sign for both of us that just says 'McGuire.'" ■

SL ONLINE

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