
The Final Word

Donna M. Soucy

President, New Hampshire Senate

An attorney serving her fourth term in the Senate, Soucy followed in her parents' footsteps by serving as a state representative, as her mother did, and a Manchester alderman, as her father did. She was the first female chair of the Manchester Fire Commission, worked for the New Hampshire Banking Department and was chief of staff for the Senate. Soucy graduated from Saint Anselm College and the University of New Hampshire School of Law.

Are leaders born or made?

I think leaders are made. There are certain qualities that individuals might be born with that help them be leaders, but really good leaders are made over time. They are made better by the experiences they have. When confronted with leadership challenges, people either rise to the occasion or they don't.

What's your most important legislative priority this session and why?

Reestablishing and increasing New Hampshire's minimum wage. It's something that I have done every year for the last seven years and this year we finally passed it out of the Senate.

How did serving as chief of staff for the Senate influence the way you interact with staff?

When I was first elected to the Senate, I think it was kind of strange for some of the staff to get used to not calling me Donna and instead calling me senator. But it certainly gave me a leg up. I think it helps me work better with the staff. There are times when, as legislators, we make certain demands on staff without understanding how those requests impact them. I said to my chief of staff when I hired him, "The fact that I've been in your role is either going to be your greatest blessing or your worst curse because I know what the job entails."

What advice do you give women considering a run for office?

I tell them there really is a difference in the style between women and men, and that difference plays a key role in helping to advance policy. Women approach things in a



way that makes the process more open and welcoming, and those approaches sometimes help to get through logjams.

What makes the New Hampshire legislature unique?

The fact that we aren't compensated. We are a volunteer legislature, which always surprises people—how hard people work and how much time they spend for \$100 a year is really quite extraordinary.

Were your parents important role models?

Absolutely. They both influence me to this day. My mother was very much a consensus builder and a good listener. She was running for a third term when she was diagnosed with cancer and she passed away a year later. I was appointed to fill the vacancy, and that's how I ended up serving in the House. It was an enormous loss. At the same time, serving in her footsteps was very comforting to me. I was surrounded by a lot of people who had great admiration and respect for her. My dad saw politics as a tool—not to advance your own aspirations and goals, but to help other people through the most difficult challenges in their lives. I think they would both be proud that I was elected by my peers to lead the Senate. I could feel their presence that day.

What would surprise people most to learn about you?

I make a great pork pie for the holidays. It's my father's family recipe. It's a French Canadian delicacy. Every family has its own spice profile for what goes into cooking the meat.

What final words would you like to share?

Some of the best legislators are the ones who open themselves up and are vulnerable in relaying their own personal stories. Human beings telling their individual stories and relating to each other in a more personal way make for a better legislative process and, in the end, better legislation.

Jane Carroll Andrade, a contributing editor, conducted this interview, which has been edited for clarity and length. To read the full conversation, visit ncsl.org/magazine.