



HALEY STEVENS

Tirelessness and stellar auto-industry credentials helped her become the first woman ever to win Michigan's 11th District, and the first Democrat to win a two-year term since 1965.

Hustles Harder

Congresswoman Stevens, right, was named Co-President of the Freshman Class of House Democrats, whose members include Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, far left, and Ilhan Omar of Minnesota.

FRESHMAN MEMBERS OF THE US CONGRESS typically receive no national attention, and only minimal publicity within their own districts. Why bother getting to know a politician whose congressional career could last all of two years?

But several members of this year's freshman class have gained instant renown, most notably Democrats Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Haley Stevens. The former, known as AOC, won a reliably Democratic district encompassing portions of the Bronx and Queens in New York City.

Ms. Stevens, meanwhile, accomplished the seemingly impossible: She flipped a suburban Detroit district that hadn't elected a Democrat to a full two-year term since 1965. She combined first-class credentials as a Democrat—having joined the Obama administration after working on his campaign—with a stellar resume as an auto-industry advocate. In 2009 she became chief of staff for the US Department of Treasury's Auto Task Force, which helped save 200,000 jobs in her state by orchestrating financial and operational restructurings of Chrysler and General Motors.

Once in Congress, she was named Co-President of the 59-member Freshman Class of House Democrats. Congresswoman Stevens has passed a bipartisan bill on STEM education that was signed by the President, and is a member of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, and Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Science and Technology.

Since the pandemic struck, Congresswoman Stevens has gained national attention for working hard on behalf of all constituents in her district, including the crippled auto industry. Wall Street Journal senior auto writer John Stoll profiled her in a column extolling her commitment to individuals in her district as well as businesses encountering supply chain problems.

Congresswoman Stevens, in a Zoom conversation with Brunswick's Patti Solis Doyle and Katharine Crallé, speaks about which approaches from her successful campaign are helping her now cut through the noise in an election year and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what she learned during the 2008 auto industry rescue about the importance of cooperating and adapting during times of prolonged crisis.

In less than two years in Congress, you've experienced the longest government shutdown in history, the impeachment trial of a US president and now a pandemic. As a leader of the freshman class, how have you stayed focused while lurching from crisis to crisis?

The other day I was on one of my longer trail walks and it dawned on me: It's not just those events. There's so many more. There were tough votes on immigration, votes around war powers resolutions, around the Equality Act, which again were largely on partisan lines.

Our incumbents will say—those who are sophomore members, junior members and so on—that this was really the freshman class that came to save America. We were also the never-evers. I have never held office before. By and large, that is the makeup of the class—people from various professions and fields bringing their talent and dogged commitment to their community, to their country, to say, "I wanted something better than this."

One of the things that I'm planning for is, how do we keep this majority for a long time to come? Not just in the two-year cycles that we all operate in, but how do we seize hold of what this first term has represented and make this a true moment of reform for us as a nation, through our legislative governance? We will be creating the next great society, coming out of this pandemic period, coming out of some of the

PHOTOGRAPH: SAUL LOEB/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

pain and polarization that is sometimes represented in general politics today. I don't want to point fingers. We are going to do that work.

You were elected to represent Michigan's 11th District as a newcomer to elected office, a millennial Democrat in a historically red district and the first woman to hold the seat. How did you reach your constituents? What are some lessons you've taken forward from your campaign?

I launched [my campaign] so early and everyone was like, "OK. You're going to run for Congress in this Republican district that's been in Republican hands since before the Moon landing. Good luck."

People in Michigan were energized. All sorts of new activism and political engagement. Talk about never-ers. The ones who elected the never-ers were the people who've never been involved in politics in their life. All of a sudden, they're knocking on doors, they're going to organizing meetings, they're doing women's marches, they're speaking out, they're exercising their voice and they're getting involved in the off-year elections.

People would ask me how they can help me. I'm thinking, "Well, I've got a splash page for a website. I'm working out of my house. Why don't you have me over to your house? Why don't you just invite somebody? Invite someone in your family, maybe it's Dad, who didn't vote the way you thought they should have in this last election. And we don't need to make it a food fight or anything like that. Let me serve as the middle person and talk to Dad. I truly made friends with so many people who were traditional Republican voters who voted for the president. I would go up to the guys, even in the Trump hats, and I would shake their hands. I'd say, "Hey, I'm Haley Stevens, and I'm going to be your next member of Congress."

While ago I was in South Lyon, a predominantly conservative part of my district, and I stopped for lunch. This guy is sort of looking at me, and I could tell he recognized me. So I said, "Hey, I'm Haley Stevens, I'm your member of Congress. How are you doing?" And he says, "I like you. I'm conservative, but I like you, and I like your message. I like that you talk about manufacturing." Which is something I geek out on, but it's also the great unifier if you ask me.

It's sticking to the reasons you ran. I ran to make this country better, to make government work for people, and to stand up for our manufacturing economy and our middle class and our innovation sector, and to continue to grow and compete and be

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PATTI SOLIS DOYLE, a Partner in Brunswick's Washington, DC office, served as an advisor to the Obama-Biden presidential campaign during the 2012 election. During the 2008 general election she was chief of staff for vice presidential operations. She also managed national campaigns for former US Senator and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. **KATHARINE CRALLÉ** is a Director based in New York. She specializes in employee engagement and helping companies establish global positioning. She previously worked in the firm's offices in London, Dubai and Hong Kong. Additional reporting by **SCOTT GEMPERLINE**, an Account Director in Washington, DC.

strategic together. That's what won me the election. And that's the work I've gotten to do in Congress.

More women than ever before ran for office and were elected in 2018. Are you aware of the impact that you all as a group have on young women and does this affect how you legislate?

It took years to get to the place where we now can say, "OK, we have the most women ever in office and we're still not even half the body." We still have more ground to cover. It was a pretty special group of trail-blazing women waiting for us in Congress—Debbie Dingell, Brenda Lawrence who's now in charge of the bipartisan women's working group, and Kirsten Gillibrand. A natural bond formed between those who were there waiting for us and then those of us who came.

The women who arrived from really tough districts often find themselves at the office late at night, doing political work and reaching out to their volunteers and their donors. So that's been some camaraderie that's formed. While we'll talk a lot about the job and the policy and the legislation, we'll also really talk a lot about how tough it is to be a working mom in Congress, whether you have a partner or not. And while I'm not married and don't have kids yet, I see my colleagues go through that element of this job and how some of the anachronisms and the traditions in the body don't necessarily fit the working woman's life.

We discuss and learn together. We bring that conversation back to our districts and it means something. I'm the first woman to hold this seat. I'm Michigan's first millennial representative and I spent a lot of time convincing people I could have and hold this job, just because they hadn't seen anyone who looked like me.

How have you and your colleagues maintained a sense of community during the unique experience of this pandemic?

There's a lot of text messages that are flying around to the tune of just that. I miss you. I miss those times after votes where we've just been able to wind down together with snacks or brainstorm or laugh or puncture the bubble for a minute and just be normal people.

We absolutely have found time to Zoom with one another. There's been a couple of Women Zoom happy hours with our women members. We held a Zoom happy hour with our freshmen class, and everyone just brought a meal or something to drink, and we just reflected and got to see one another's faces. Thank goodness technology enables us to do

it. That's obviously something the entire country is experiencing right now.

COVID-19 has ruled out traditional campaigning right now. How have you changed your re-election strategy? How would you advise Joe Biden on a national level?

We need to get out the vote. The volunteers and people who stood up to help get me elected are going to be right there for me again. But the undecided voters, the independents, the ones that you're sort of chasing down at the last minute—how are you going to get to them?

There's no playbook for this pandemic so I told my team, that we have to change everything. It's immediately uncomfortable, but we have the ability to make these changes. My campaign team just



The Congresswoman shares her district's pride in Detroit's history of resilience. "Detroit always rises," she says.



PHOTOGRAPH: ANTHONY LANZILOTE/BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES

started running with that ball from the get-go. We were using our volunteers to call people and just check in and say, "Hey, how are you doing? Do you have the information about coronavirus? You have the state website? Do you have any questions for the Congresswoman? How can we help you?" and weren't really talking about the political. We're getting there.

I don't think you need to go so creative that you leave the reservation. But we're planning for not having the ability to door-knock comfortably. Phone calls are great, but the contact rate is a lot lower. You could do letter-writing campaigns, but you still can't get that immediate voter reaction. Some of the elements of the campaign are going to be a lot harder, and it is not the time to be *laissez faire*. I cannot let up an inch, nor would I. I still need get re-elected.

When the pandemic forced automotive plants to close, "I pounded my fist on the table," says the Congresswoman, who during the Great Recession served as Chief of Staff for the Treasury Department's auto task force.

The pandemic has minimized the individual touch that is often celebrated in campaigns. Thinking about Vice President Biden, he has to think really clearly about television appearances, both on broadcast and cable, and streaming. And he needs to ensure he still has that field operation that can exchange and liaise with voters as well. I have a lot of voters who have voted Democrat and voted Republican, and they need someone to talk to them and convince them which way to vote this year.

From your experience as Chief of Staff for the Treasury department's Auto Task Force, what did you learn that is relevant in this pandemic?

I can basically see Chrysler from my house. Across the street are many of Chrysler's suppliers. And we could see what was coming. It did not come as a surprise when the suppliers and auto manufacturers had to shut down as part of the shelter-in-place approach to keep people safe.

But still, when the news came that they had to shut down operations, I pounded my fist on the table. All of these manufacturing facilities hum with a great workforce and multi-multimillion-dollar pieces of equipment that produce components that go into the vehicle that you drive. Each car has a billion dollars of innovation that goes into it.

I thought about this district and the people who live here—all that ingenuity and self-determination. When Detroit was being written off the map during the Great Recession, when car sales had the lowest drop in the history of the automobile, the industry not only emerged from that darkness, it emerged healthier. The industry re-energized. Our auto industry, with 75 percent of the R&D in autonomous vehicle technology, is nothing short of amazing.

The question now becomes similar to 2008—what are sales going to be? My old boss used to say, "We're not trying to boil the ocean." Now we've got 15 oceans boiling. There's a hospitality crisis, a health care crisis, a restaurant crisis, a crisis threatening the future of small business, a supply chain crisis and plenty more. We've taken some productive bipartisan steps and passed some bills into law that have provided some stop-gaps. But the work is not over. People are out of work. People are counting on us.

You see shirts that say, "Detroit Hustles Harder" and "Detroit Versus Everybody." Because we've been through this. We've been down several times before, yet we've picked ourselves back up. I'd say, Detroit always rises. We rise when times are steady and we certainly rise when times are tough. We're going to make it through this, and I'm working late. ♦