



## THE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL FOR WOMEN IN NATIONAL SECURITY

### HOW TO SUCCEED IN THE POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS PROCESS

There are many paths to the great honor and privilege of public service. Although there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach, if you are interested in an appointment requiring U.S. Senate confirmation, there are important considerations to understand in making professional choices. The following tips will help put you in a position to be selected for appointment and prepared for the rigorous confirmation process.

#### GETTING CONSIDERED AND NOMINATED

It is important to understand that the careers of successful political appointees do not necessarily follow a linear path building toward a U.S. Senate-confirmed position. If you are ultimately seeking such a position, you must be open to many possibilities early in your career. You need to be ready to take a calculated risk and not to miss an opportunity when it arises. A few key suggestions to best position yourself for a political appointment are as follows:

- Excel in your current position. Do not overlook your current role for the next one. Demonstrating a commitment to excellence will help you stand out.
- Develop a strong professional network early in your career. Doing so will open up many opportunities and also support you through the confirmation process.
- It is often helpful to have worked on a political campaign, as a political consultant, in the White House, in a federal agency, or in Congress. Doing so will help you build an extensive and helpful professional network.
- If interested in foreign service, it would be helpful to take the foreign service exam, which is a “gold standard” credential for life.
- Seek a mentor and build a strong relationship. Volunteer to help your mentor and expect to give more than you receive. Your mentor should be genuinely honest with you.
- Be open to accepting roles you had not sought and cultivate versatility in your career. Do not focus exclusively on the level of a position, but whether you have a passion for the work. If you love what you do, you will enjoy your work and do a better job.
- Be honest about your interests and capabilities. Acknowledge if a position is not right for you.
- Be cautious about ‘campaigning’ for a position because such efforts can backfire. Be strategic and thoughtful to put yourself in the right place to be selected. The best way to advance is to do a great job and to think of others first. Always be humble and respectful.

*This information summarizes LCWINS’ Session 1: LCWINS Webinar Series Kickoff: How to Succeed in the Political Appointments Process, moderated by Ambassador Eileen Donahoe, and featuring panelists Dina Powell McCormick, Ambassador Wendy Sherman, and Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall. For more information, visit us at <https://www.lcwins.org/>.*

## GETTING THROUGH THE CONFIRMATION PROCESS

The process of obtaining confirmation by the U.S. Senate is tremendously rigorous, involves extensive vetting of nominees, and is often difficult on nominees and their families. It is essential to understand and acknowledge the rigor of the process and the expectations of nominees. Below are some important considerations and tips for surviving and succeeding in this demanding process:

- Get your personal finances in order. The vetting process involves an extraordinary level of detailed scrutiny. Have a frank conversation with your spouse or partner, especially if you are about to undertake a pay cut or long periods of time away from home. Make sure that you have ample detailed documentation of every aspect of your finances.
- Always be mindful of social media posts and make sure all of your accounts are in order before the vetting process begins. Remember that things posted to social media never really disappear.
- Gather all of your professional or public writings. Identify any past comments or interviews with the press. Make sure you know the information that is out in the public realm. Be prepared to explain controversial quotes or interviews with complete and truthful answers.
- Relationships built over decades that are not about politics will help sustain you during the confirmation process.
- Relationships across the aisle are important in national security. People you work with substantively across the aisle can help support you. Be ready to be an olive branch.
- Prepare, prepare, and then prepare some more. You can never be too prepared for a Senate confirmation hearing. Make sure you are prepared for both the substance and the process. Ask the advice of others who have held the same position in the past, on a bipartisan basis.
- Meet with Members of Congress, their staffs, and anyone relevant who will meet with you. At the same time, try to keep a low public profile while your nomination is pending. Heed the advice of your White House handlers.
- There is arguably a higher bar for women in national security. Women often feel that they need to be twice as good. People may underestimate a woman's candidacy, so as the applicant, use this perception to your advantage and exceed your audience's expectations based on your rigorous preparation. Be courteous and respectful to everyone, including your detractors. The objective is to get confirmed, not to win debates at this stage.