

Chris Coons

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Chris Coons

- *Coons is the 1983 Truman Scholar from Delaware, and the first recipient of the award to serve in the United States Senate.*
- *Coons currently co-chairs the weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast.*
- *Coons is currently the vice chair of the Senate Ethics Committee.*
- *Previously, Coons was the county executive of New Castle County.*

Christopher Andrew Coons (born September 9, 1963) is an American politician serving as the Junior United States Senator from Delaware since 2010. A member of the Democratic Party, he won a special election to succeed Ted Kaufman, who had been appointed to the seat when Joe Biden resigned to become Vice President of the United States. Previously, Coons was the county executive of New Castle County. Coons is the 1983 Truman Scholar from Delaware, and the first recipient of the award to serve in the United States Senate.

Raised in Hockessin, Delaware, Coons graduated from Amherst College, where he joined Delta Kappa Epsilon Fraternity. He received graduate degrees from Yale Divinity School and Yale Law School. He went to work as a volunteer relief worker in Kenya, where he had taken classes in the University of Nairobi, later returning to the U.S. to work for the Coalition for the Homeless in New York. He spent some time as a legal clerk in New York before returning to Delaware in 1996, where he spent eight years as in-house counsel for a materials manufacturing company. In the interim he worked for several nonprofit organizations.

He worked on several political campaigns in his early career, including Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign. In college he switched from being a Republican to a Democrat, and in 1996 he became a delegate from Wilmington to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. His political career began in earnest on the New Castle County Council in 2000, where he served as council president. He was elected county executive in 2004 and served for six years. There he balanced the county budget with a surplus in fiscal year 2010 by cutting spending and raising taxes, and the county maintained a AAA bond rating.

Coons won the 2010 special election against the Republican candidate Christine O'Donnell. Coons was elected to a full term in 2014. Coons is currently the vice chair of the Senate Ethics Committee. His other committee assignments include Appropriations, Foreign Relations, Judiciary, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Coons previously served as ranking member of the United States Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy and the Judiciary Subcommittee on Bankruptcy and the Courts.

Coons is the incoming co-chair for the 2019 National Prayer Breakfast. He previously co-chaired the 2017 National Prayer Breakfast. Coons currently co-chairs the weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast.

Early life and education

- *Coons was born in Greenwich, Connecticut, the son of Sarah Louise "Sally" (née Ives) and Kenelm Winslow "Ken" Coons.*
- *During his junior year of college, Coons studied abroad at the University of Nairobi in Kenya through St. Lawrence University's Kenya Semester Program.*
- *Coons grew up in Hockessin, Delaware, where he attended the public Yorklyn Elementary School and later H.B.*
- *In 1983, Chris Coons was awarded the Truman Scholarship.*

Coons was born in Greenwich, Connecticut, the son of Sarah Louise "Sally" (née Ives) and Kenelm Winslow "Ken" Coons. His ancestry includes English and Irish. Coons grew up in Hockessin, Delaware, where he attended the public Yorklyn Elementary School and later H.B. DuPont Middle School. He graduated from Tower Hill School and then Amherst College in 1985 with a Bachelor of Arts in chemistry and political science. While in college, he was a member of Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity (Sigma chapter) and was a U.S. Senate intern. In 1983, Chris Coons was awarded the Truman Scholarship. During his junior year of college, Coons studied abroad at the University of Nairobi in Kenya through St. Lawrence University's Kenya Semester Program. He earned a master's degree in Ethics from Yale Divinity School and a J.D. degree from Yale Law School.

Professional career

- *After returning to Delaware in 1996, Coons began his eight-year career as in-house counsel for W.L.*
- *Coons clerked for Judge Jane Richards Roth on the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, and then worked for the National "I Have a Dream" Foundation in New York.*
- *Coons is on the Board of Selectors of Jefferson Awards for Public Service.*

After college, Coons worked in Washington, D.C., for the Investor Responsibility Research Center, where he wrote a book on South Africa and the U.S. divestment movement. He then worked as a volunteer for the South African Council of Churches and as a relief worker in

Kenya, before returning to the U.S. to work for the National Coalition for the Homeless in New York. In 1992, he earned a J.D. degree from Yale Law School, and a master's degree in ethics from Yale Divinity School.

Coons clerked for Judge Jane Richards Roth on the United States Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, and then worked for the National "I Have a Dream" Foundation in New York. After returning to Delaware in 1996, Coons began his eight-year career as in-house counsel for W.L. Gore & Associates, Inc., Newark, Delaware-based makers of Gore-Tex fabrics and other high-tech materials. There he was responsible for the ethics training program, federal government relations, e-commerce legal work, and for general commercial contracting.

He has also worked for several nonprofits, including the Coalition for the Homeless, the education-oriented "I Have a Dream" Foundation, and the South African Council of Churches. Coons has served on several boards including First State Innovation, the Bear/Glasgow Boys & Girls Club, and the Delaware College of Art & Design.

Coons is on the Board of Selectors of Jefferson Awards for Public Service.

Early political career

- *As New Castle county executive, Coons raised taxes despite having campaigned on a promise not to increase them.*
- *Coons first became involved in politics working on behalf of Republican politicians.*
- *During college, he switched from being a Republican to a Democrat and in 1988, Coons became the issues director for the U.S. Senate campaign of Democratic Delaware Lt. Gov.*

Coons first became involved in politics working on behalf of Republican politicians. As a 17-year-old, in 1980, he independently campaigned for Ronald Reagan's presidential run. He also worked on Bill Roth's U.S. Senate campaign in 1982. During college, he switched from being a Republican to a Democrat and in 1988, Coons became the issues director for the U.S. Senate campaign of Democratic Delaware Lt. Gov. Shien Biau Woo. He was a delegate from Wilmington to the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

His first elected office was president of the New Castle County Council, elected in 2000 and serving four years before being elected county executive in 2004. He was the endorsed candidate of the New Castle County Democratic Party in 2008, and was re-nominated by the party on September 9, 2008. Coons was re-elected on November 4, 2008, unopposed in the general election. In his six years in office as county executive, Coons balanced the budget with a surplus in fiscal year 2010 by cutting spending and raising taxes. As New Castle county executive, Coons raised taxes despite having campaigned on a promise not to increase them. New Castle County maintained a AAA bond rating throughout his tenure.

U.S. Senate

2010 election

- *Coons ran in the 2010 special election for the U.S. Senate seat then held by Democrat Ted Kaufman, who was appointed after Joe Biden resigned.*
- *During the campaign, a controversy arose surrounding an article Coons wrote in 1985 for his college newspaper, entitled "Chris Coons: The Making of a Bearded Marxist".*

Coons ran in the 2010 special election for the U.S. Senate seat then held by Democrat Ted Kaufman, who was appointed after Joe Biden resigned. He was initially set to face Republican Congressman and former Governor Mike Castle in the general election. Coons was initially a decided underdog in part due to Castle's moderate profile and longstanding popularity in the state. However, the dynamics of the race were significantly altered when Christine O'Donnell, a considerably more conservative Republican who had been Biden's opponent in 2008, upset Castle in the Republican primary.

In the first post-primary polls, Rasmussen Reports showed Coons with a double-digit lead over O'Donnell, describing this as a "remarkable turnaround" given that the race had leaned Republican before O'Donnell's primary victory. In the first week of October, Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind Poll released the results of its research, showing Coons with a 17-point lead, 53%-36%, over O'Donnell, and pointing out that 85% of self-identified Democratic voters had united behind Coons, while only 68% of Republican voters endorsed O'Donnell. Days before the election, a second Fairleigh Dickinson poll showed Coons leading 57% to 36% among likely voters, and leading 72% to 20% among voters who described themselves as moderates. As polls closed at 8 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, multiple news sources announced that Coons had defeated O'Donnell based on exit poll data. Final results gave Coons close to a 17-point margin over O'Donnell, capturing 56.6% of the vote to her 40%.

During the campaign, a controversy arose surrounding an article Coons wrote in 1985 for his college newspaper, entitled "Chris Coons: The Making of a Bearded Marxist". In it, he describes his transformation from a Republican to what Fox News described as a "Democrat suspicious of America's power and ideals." Dave Hoffman, a Coons campaign spokesman, said the title of the article was designed as a humorous take-off on a joke Coons' college friends had made about how his time outside the country had affected his outlook. "After witnessing crushing poverty and the consequences of the Reagan Administration's 'constructive engagement' with the South African apartheid regime, he rethought his political views, returned to the America he loved and proudly registered as a Democrat," Hoffman said in a statement to Politico.

According to Fox News, Coons was "targeted by Republicans" over the 25-year-old piece. Coons himself downplayed the article, as well as controversial past statements by O'Donnell, saying that voters were interested in current issues such as job creation and the

national debt and were not "particularly interested in statements that either of us made 20 or 30 years ago." David Weigel, writing in Slate, opined: "If the Tea Party Express slings the 'bearded Marxist' nonsense, I doubt it will work."

2014 election

- *Coons won 55.8% of the popular vote (130,655 to Wade's 98,823 and to Groff's 4,560).*
- *Senator Chris Coons was elected to his first full term by defeating Republican challenger Kevin Wade and Green Party candidate Andrew Gross on Tuesday, November 4, 2014.*

Incumbent U.S. Senator Chris Coons was elected to his first full term by defeating Republican challenger Kevin Wade and Green Party candidate Andrew Gross on Tuesday, November 4, 2014. Wade, an engineer and businessman also ran against U.S. Senator Tom Carper in 2012. Coons won 55.8% of the popular vote (130,655 to Wade's 98,823 and to Groff's 4,560).



Senator Coons holding a press conference

Tenure

- *In October 2013, Coons announced the formation of the inaugural Senate Chicken Caucus in the United States Senate.*
- *On November 15, 2010, Coons was sworn in as Delaware's newest senator by Vice President Joe Biden, the former occupant of Coons' seat in the Senate.*
- *As a result, Coons gave up his seat on the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.*

On November 15, 2010, Coons was sworn in as Delaware's newest senator by Vice President Joe Biden, the former occupant of Coons' seat in the Senate. Joe Manchin of West

Virginia was sworn in on the same day, though he took an advantage in seniority over Coons, as the former Governor of West Virginia.

The Affordable Care Act (commonly called Obamacare) had already been passed when Coons took office, but he has voted against repealing it, emphasizing that seniors in Delaware would have to pay higher prescription drug prices if it was repealed. In a May 8, 2017 appearance on Morning Joe, Coons predicted the final product of the Republican health care bill would not be produced until after the 2018 midterm elections. During an interview in September 2017, Coons said the Graham-Cassidy bill, meant to replace the Affordable Care Act, would be playing "Russian roulette with the American health care system."

On the issue of abortion, Coons has received a 100% rating from the Planned Parenthood Action Fund and 0% rating from the National Right to Life Committee.

In June 2013, after the death of Democratic Senator Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey, Coons was appointed to his seat on the influential Committee on Appropriations, becoming the first senator from Delaware to serve on the committee in 40 years. As a result, Coons gave up his seat on the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

In October 2013, Coons announced the formation of the inaugural Senate Chicken Caucus in the United States Senate. He stated, "I hope that the Senate Chicken Caucus will give America's chicken producers a platform to better inform legislators about the industry's vital contributions to our economy, and promote policy solutions that help their businesses grow and thrive."

On December 11, 2013, Coons introduced the Victims of Child Abuse Act Reauthorization Act of 2013 (S. 1799; 113th Congress), a bill that would reauthorize the Victims of Child Abuse Act of 1990 and would authorize funding through 2018 to help child abuse victims. Coons said that "we have a responsibility to protect our children from violence and abuse."

In March 2014, Coons voted against President Obama's nomination of civil rights lawyer Debo Adebile to be Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, even though he believed that Adebile would have been "an asset to the Justice Department." He stated that voting for a nominee "who would face such visceral opposition from law enforcement on his first day on the job" was troubling and the vote was "one of the most difficult I have taken since joining the Senate". President Obama described the Senate's vote against Adebile as "a travesty based on wildly unfair character attacks against a good and qualified public servant." An open letter to Coons from students, faculty and alumni of the Yale Law and Divinity Schools, of which Coons is an alumnus, criticized his vote as "alarm[ing]" and "signal[ing] a lack of respect for the fundamental American legal principle that all parties have a right to zealous representation."

Coons was mentioned as a possible replacement for the late Justice Antonin Scalia in February 2016.

In April 2017, after President Trump tweeted that North Korea had "disrespected the wishes of China & its highly respected President" with a recent missile launch, Coons said Trump was understanding China was his sole "constructive path forward on North Korea" but that diplomacy would not work through tweeting. In September, Coons said, "Congress and the administration need to prepare for what would happen if we were required by increased threats that were increasingly credible from North Korea, to prepare for escalation of conflict."

In April 2018, following the FBI raid on the hotel room and offices of Trump's personal attorney, Michael Cohen, Coons, together with Cory Booker, Lindsey Graham, and Thom Tillis, introduced new legislation to "limit President Trump's ability to fire special counsel Robert Mueller". Termed the Special Counsel Independence and Integrity Act, the legislation would allow any special counsel, in this case Mueller, receive an "expedited judicial review" in the 10 days following being dismissed to determine if said dismissal was suitable. If negative, the special counsel would be reinstated. At the same time, according to The Hill, the bill would "codify regulations" that a special counsel could only be fired for by a senior Justice Department official, while having to provide reasons in writing.

Committee assignments

- *Source: United States Senate*

Select Committee on Ethics (Vice Chairman)

Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development

Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government (Ranking Member)

Subcommittee on the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs

Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

Committee on Foreign Relations

Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy

Subcommittee on Multilateral International Development, Multilateral Institutions, and International Economic, Energy and Environmental Policy

Subcommittee on State Department and USAID Management, International Operations and Bilateral International Development

Committee on the Judiciary

Subcommittee on Crime and Terrorism

Subcommittee on Oversight, Agency Action, Federal Rights and Federal Courts (Ranking Member)

Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology and the Law (Ranking Member)

Subcommittee on the Constitution

Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship

Previous (2010–2015)

Committee on the Budget

Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Source: United States Senate

Caucus memberships

- *Senate Diabetes Caucus*
- *Senate Competitiveness Caucus (co-chair)*
- *Source: United States Senate*
- *Senate Chicken Caucus (co-chair)*
- *Senate Manufacturing Caucus*
- *Senate Oceans Caucus*
- *Senate India Caucus*

Senate Law Enforcement Caucus (co-chair)

Senate Competitiveness Caucus (co-chair)

Senate Chicken Caucus (co-chair)

Senate Human Rights Caucus (co-chair)

Congressional Trademark Caucus (co-chair)

Senate Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Caucus (co-chair)

Senate Caucus on Malaria and Neglected Tropical Diseases (co-chair)

Senate Oceans Caucus

Senate Manufacturing Caucus

Rare Disease Congressional Caucus

Senate Renewables and Energy Efficiency Caucus

Congressional International Creativity and Theft-Prevention Caucus

Senate National Guard Caucus

Senate Small Brewers Caucus

Congressional Bicameral High-Speed & Intercity Passenger Rail Caucus

Senate Diabetes Caucus

Senate Global Internet Freedom Caucus

Senate India Caucus

Congressional French Caucus

Cloud Task Force, Congressional High Tech Caucus

Bicameral Congressional AIDS Caucus

Senate Veterans Jobs Caucus

Senate Air Force Caucus

National Service Congressional Caucus

Congressional Inventions Caucus

Afterschool Caucuses

Source: United States Senate

Political positions

Abortion

- *In 2015, Senator Coons signed on to an amicus brief to the Supreme Court in the Whole Woman's Health v. Cole case which urges the Court to step in to prevent states from creating laws that restricts a woman's access to abortion.*
- *Senator Coons supports Roe v. Wade and that abortion should remain legal throughout the country.*

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Gun law

- *Coons supported the Feinstein Amendment, which sought to ban known and suspected terrorists from buying firearms.*
- *The next year, Coons participated in the Chris Murphy gun control filibuster.*

- *In 2015, Coons co-signed a letter to Obama, along with 23 other Democratic Senators, asking the president to take executive action on gun control in the wake of the Umpqua Community College shooting.*
- *As of 2010, Coons had a "F" rating from the National Rifle Association due to his stance on gun control.*

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Foreign policy

- *Coons is also a co-sponsor of a Senate resolution expressing objection to the UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which condemned Israeli settlement building in the occupied Palestinian territories as a violation of international law.*
- *Coons condemned the genocide of the Rohingya Muslim minority in Myanmar and called for a stronger response to the crisis.*
- *Coons is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations committee and is a staunch supporter of Israel.*

In December 2010, Coons voted for the ratification of New START, a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and Russian Federation obliging both countries to have no more than 1,550 strategic warheads as well as 700 launchers deployed during the next seven years along with providing a continuation of on-site inspections that halted when START I expired the previous year. It was the first arms treaty with Russia in eight years.

Coons is a member of the Senate Foreign Relations committee and is a staunch supporter of Israel. He is a co-sponsor of the controversial Anti-Boycott Act, Senate Bill 720, which the ACLU has been vocally opposed to. He has also been a guest speaker at AIPAC events. Coons is also a co-sponsor of a Senate resolution expressing objection to the UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which condemned Israeli settlement building in the occupied Palestinian territories as a violation of international law.

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In October 2018, Coons was one of seven senators to sign a letter to United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo expressing that they found it "difficult to reconcile known facts with at least two" of the Trump administration's certifications that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were attempting to protect Yemen civilians and were in compliance with US laws on arms sales, citing their lack of understanding for "a certification that the Saudi and Emirati governments are complying with applicable agreements and laws regulating

defense articles when the [memo] explicitly states that, in certain instances, they have not done so."

In November 2018, Coons joined Senator Marco Rubio and a bipartisan group of lawmakers in sending a letter to the Trump administration raising concerns about China's undue influence over media outlets and academic institutions in the United States. They wrote: "In American news outlets, Beijing has used financial ties to suppress negative information about the CCP. In the past four years, multiple media outlets with direct or indirect financial ties to China allegedly decided not to publish stories on wealth and corruption in the CCP...Beijing has also sought to use relationships with American academic institutions and student groups to shape public discourse."

In April 2019, Coons was one of thirty-four senators to sign a letter to President Trump encouraging him "to listen to members of your own Administration and reverse a decision that will damage our national security and aggravate conditions inside Central America", asserting that Trump had "consistently expressed a flawed understanding of U.S. foreign assistance" since becoming president and that he was "personally undermining efforts to promote U.S. national security and economic prosperity" through preventing the use of Fiscal Year 2018 national security funding. The senators argued that foreign assistance to Central American countries created less migration to the U.S., citing the funding's helping to improve conditions in those countries.

Fiscal position

- *He has stated his opposition to the Obama-era government bailouts.*
- *He is against right-to-work laws, and supports internet sales tax.*
- *He is a supporter of free trade agreements.*

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Housing

- *In April 2019, Coons was one of forty-one senators to sign a bipartisan letter to the housing subcommittee praising the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 4 Capacity Building program as authorizing "HUD to partner with national nonprofit community development organizations to provide education, training, and financial support to local community development corporations (CDCs) across the country" and expressing disappointment that President Trump's budget "has slated this program for elimination after decades of successful economic and community development."*

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community development organizations to provide education, training, and financial support to local community development corporations (CDCs) across the country" and expressing disappointment that President Trump's budget "has slated this program for elimination after decades of successful economic and community development." The senators wrote of their hope that the subcommittee would support continued funding for Section 4 in Fiscal Year 2020.

Labor

- *In May 2018, Coons was one of twelve senators to sign a letter to Chairman of the Federal Labor Relations Authority Colleen Kiko urging the FLRA to end efforts to close its Boston regional office until Congress debated the matter, furthering that the FLRA closing down its seven regional offices would cause staff to be placed farther away from the federal employees they protect the rights of.*

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LGBT issues

- *In October 2018, Coons was one of twenty senators to sign a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urging Pompeo to reverse the rolling back of a policy that granted visas to same-sex partners of LGBTQ diplomats who had unions which were not recognized by their home countries, writing that too many places around the world have seen LGBTQ individuals "subjected to discrimination and unspeakable violence, and receive little or no protection from the law or local authorities" and that the US refusing to let LGBTQ diplomats bring their partners to the US would be equivalent of America upholding "the discriminatory policies of many countries around the world."*

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Electoral history

Personal life

- *Coons is married to the former Annie Lingenfelter.*
- *Although Coons is Presbyterian, his wife is Catholic, and they attend St. Ann's Catholic Church in Wilmington.*
- *Coons describes himself as "someone who is, privately, fairly religious," though he has never thought "that needs to be a big part of [campaigning]."*

Coons is married to the former Annie Lingenfelter. They have three children: twins Mike and Jack, and daughter Maggie. They live in Wilmington, Delaware. Although Coons is Presbyterian, his wife is Catholic, and they attend St. Ann's Catholic Church in Wilmington. Coons describes himself as "someone who is, privately, fairly religious," though he has never thought "that needs to be a big part of [campaigning]."

In 1999, he was awarded the Governor's Outstanding Volunteer Award for his work with the "I Have a Dream" Foundation, the Governor's Mentoring Council, and the United Way of Delaware.

References

External links

- *Chris Coons for Senate*
- *Senator Chris Coons official U.S. Senate website*
- *Chris Coons at Curlie*

Senator Chris Coons official U.S. Senate website

Chris Coons for Senate

Chris Coons at Curlie

Biography at the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress

Profile at Vote Smart

Financial information (federal office) at the Federal Election Commission

Legislation sponsored at the Library of Congress