

Congress Starts Electing Scientists

(CNN)The next Congress will include seven newly elected scientists, including a nuclear engineer and a biochemist.

Their supporters say these new scientist-legislators, all of them Democrats, will bring a fact-based approach to public policy and impact such issues as nuclear disarmament and climate change.

"They bring a real wealth of experience that's really lacking in Congress today," said Shaughnessy Naughton, president of 314 Action, a political action committee devoted to electing more public officials with backgrounds in science and related fields. "There are more reality show people in Congress, including our president, than there are chemists and physicists."

The committee endorsed 13 candidates for Congress this year who had some kind of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) background. Seven of them were voted in. The current Congress [boasts just a few scientists](#) -- among them a physicist, a microbiologist, and a chemist, all in the House. Among the 535 voting members are also eight engineers (7 in the House; 1 in the Senate) and several lawmakers who come from the medical field, such as physicians, dentists and psychologists.

The reason behind the run

Naughton said that when it comes to political influence in Washington, scientists have typically stood in the sidelines. Not so much anymore.

"Traditionally among the scientific community the attitude has been science is above politics and shouldn't be involved in politics," she said. "Clearly that is not working."

Since taking office President Donald Trump has [withdrawn from the Paris climate agreement](#), questioned a [UN report](#) warning of the dire consequences of climate change [and supported](#) the EPA's rollback on carbon pollution standards.

Naughton accused President Trump and his administration of waging a "war on facts and truth" and said she's seen a recent surge in the number of scientists -- "political outsiders," she called them -- running for office to speak out on issues such as climate change and healthcare.

Here's a closer look at Congress' new scientists.

Three engineers

Joe Cunningham, who secured South Carolina's second Democratic seat in House District 1, has degrees in ocean engineering and law. Cunningham has lobbied for reducing the costs of healthcare, battling climate change, equality for women and other issues.

Pennsylvania's 6th District seat will be filled by Democrat **Chrissy Houlahan**, a Stanford engineer who was once a North Philadelphia science teacher and a captain in the US Air Force.

[Democrats gain second House seat in South Carolina with Joe Cunningham win](#)

"Her victory is a win for Democrats, women and pro-science advocates across the country," 314 Action's Naughton said in a statement.

Elaine Luria, winner of Virginia's House race for the 2nd district, is a former nuclear engineer and US Navy commander. The Democrat was one of the first women to attend the US Naval Nuclear Power School.

She has also pushed for more affordable choices in healthcare, highlighted the importance of protecting the environment and defended strict prohibitions on animal cruelty.

Two medical experts

Lauren Underwood, winner in Illinois's 14th congressional district, was a registered nurse who was appointed by President Obama as senior advisor at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. She's a health policy expert and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University.

Her victory is "monumental for healthcare advocates in the US," Naughton wrote. "She ran an incredible campaign rooted in hope and practical, experience-based solutions for our country's healthcare crisis."

Another healthcare professional, **Kim Schrier**, [won in Washington's 8th District](#). Schrier, a pediatrician, has been one of the loudest voices pushing for affordable healthcare.



Dr. Kim Schrier is leading in her race, but CNN hasn't yet declared a winner in the race "I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes as a teenager," [she wrote](#). "I know firsthand what it means to worry about health insurance and rising costs."

A biochemist

Sean Casten, who won a seat in Illinois' 6th District, is president of Recycled Energy Development, a company that reduces greenhouse gas emissions by recycling waste energy and converting it to electrical and thermal power. He has degrees in molecular biology and biochemistry and engineering management.

And a software engineer



Jacky Rosen

Rep. Jacky Rosen picked up a Senate seat for the Democratic party in Nevada, unseating Republican incumbent Dean Heller.

She is a computer programmer, a software developer and a strong advocate for renewable energy, better teacher pay and affordable healthcare.