

“Politics Hit Me Like a Lightning Bolt”

Florida’s first Jewish congresswoman launched her public-service career at UF.

WHEN REPRESENTATIVE Debbie Wasserman Schultz* came to the University of Florida as a freshman, she planned to major in veterinary medicine. But when the current Democratic National Committee chair won a senate seat in Student Government, “politics hit me like a lightning bolt,” she says.

“It was then that I decided to make public service my career.”

As part of an upstart party that challenged the dominance of Florida Blue Key, Wasserman Schultz (BA ’88, MA ’90) worked her way up to senate president.

“SG used to be very restrictive and exclusive before my party ran and won,” she says. “The change ultimately made SG more accessible to all students.”

She was also active in UF Savant, Omicron Delta Kappa and the Inter-

Residence Hall Association, among other organizations. When Wasserman Schultz felt that Rawlings Hall residents didn’t get the attention they deserved from the Broward-Rawlings Area Council, she created the Rawlings Area Council and served as its first president. Today, the congresswoman continues to support her alma mater.

In addition to supporting UF Hillel, Wasserman Schultz — a mother of three who lives in Weston — attends Homecoming each year and tries to attend at least one other game. As a breast cancer survivor, she worked with UF’s Athletic Association to have one game a year dedicated to raising breast cancer awareness. She also meets with SG leadership in Washington and speaks to students from the political campaigning graduate program each year.

Lessons learned on campus have impacted her life and career, she says.

“I learned that there is no substitute for hard work,” Wasserman Schultz says. “I may not always be successful at everything I set out to do, but I will never lose because I got outworked.”

President Barack Obama appointed her as DNC chair in 2011, an experience she describes as “incredible.”

“Anytime the President asks you to take on a responsibility like chairing the DNC, it is a source of pride,” she says. “But I’m most proud of being elected by my constituents to represent them in Washington and in Congress.”

— Ashley Cisneros (BSJ ’04, MS ’08)



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U.S. Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz was the youngest woman ever elected to the Florida State Legislature when she took office in 1992 at age 26. She became DNC chairwoman last year.