



## ADVOCACY

# Robyn Blumner

IN 2006 BRITISH EVOLUTIONARY biologist **Richard Dawkins** established foundations in England and the United States to promote science education and build a community for atheists. Now the U.S. arm of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science is adopting a sharper political edge with longtime Tampa Bay Times columnist **Robyn Blumner** as its new executive director.

Blumner, 52, wrote a column in 2004 in which for the first time she publicly identified as an atheist, and she denounced discrimination against atheists at a Tampa City Council meeting. Two years later she read Dawkins' "The God Delusion." The book, she says, "just gave me so much hope that people who had

a lot of doubt about the faith that they were brought up in would now see a way clear to leave the mythology of their past."

She hopes to build up the Dawkins Foundation's fundraising, reorganize its communications and better coordinate volunteers. The idea, she says, is to have scientists ready to speak out on issues such as the separation of church and state. Blumner says atheists' reluctance to assert themselves in public has harmed policy decisions: "We see the consequences of religion encroaching in public policy and education when we see debates over climate change and stem cell research."

Blumner wants to adopt the tactics gay and lesbians have used to lobby for cultural accep-

tance, and will encourage atheists to speak up in their communities.

In 1994 Blumner, 52, joined the editorial board of what was then the St. Petersburg Times and became a syndicated columnist in 1997.

## Travis Weber, Arina Grossu

A LEADING LOBBYING group for social conservatives, the Family Research Council, has hired a Pennsylvania lawyer and former Navy pilot, **Travis Weber** to direct its Center for Religious Liberty and the former director of a Catholic nonprofit, **Arina Grossu**, to run a Center for Human Dignity.

Next week, Weber will monitor Supreme Court oral arguments on whether companies with religious objections to birth control should have to provide access to contraception as mandated by the 2010 health care law. He says religious freedom also is affected by efforts to recognize same-sex marriage and prohibit discrimination in hiring gays and lesbians. "As long as the government and other folks adopt a narrow view of religious exercise," he says, "that basically says you can live in your house and worship in your church, but don't start acting on your beliefs, it's going to implicate other concerns."

Grossu, 31, has for the past three-and-a-half years been executive director of the Word Proclaimed Institute, a Maryland-based group that seeks to help clergy become more immersed in Scripture. From 2008 to 2010 she worked for the conservative communications firm CRC Public Relations, helping anti-abortion groups. Grossu says her job at the Family Research Council is "to defend the dignity of all human life from conception until natural death."

— KRISTIN COYNER

## LOBBYING

# Tom Michels

LOUISIANA SEN. **Mary L. Landrieu's** former legislative director, **Tom Michels**, has left Shell Oil Co.'s lobbying team for the business development and lobbying firm BlueWater Strategies, where he is a principal.

At Shell, Michels led advocacy on shale gas and oil production, among other areas. At BlueWa-

ter, he's lobbying on a broader set of energy and environment issues because the firm represents nuclear and mining clients in addition to oil and gas companies and groups.

Before working for Landrieu, Michels, 39, was director of public affairs for the National Oceans Industries Association, a trade



group for offshore oil and gas producers.

## Dan McCarthy

THE FIRST GROUP, a government relations firm, has hired Anheuser-Busch's senior director of national affairs, **Dan McCarthy**, to launch a public affairs practice.

In January two of the group's four founding partners, **Kyle Simmons**, a former aide to Senate Minority Leader **Mitch**

**McConnell** of Kentucky, and **Bob Russell**, an aide to Democrat **Mark Pryor** of Arkansas, left to start their own firm.

McCarthy, 37, was a White House legislative assistant during President **George W. Bush's** first term, and was deputy assistant director for external affairs for the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City.

He joined Anheuser-Busch in 2004.

## HEALTH CARE

## Paula Burg

AFTER 13 YEARS as a congressional aide, **Paula Burg** has joined pharmaceutical company Pfizer Inc. as senior director of government relations. For the past seven years, Burg was a health policy and budget aide to Sen. **Patty Murray**, a Washington Democrat. When Murray became chairwoman of the Budget Committee in 2013, Burg was named the committee's majority staff director and senior adviser for health and entitlements.

Murray is also a senior member of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

"There's something to be said about seeing things from the other side," Burg says of her move to Pfizer. "Across the board, as you look at the future of health care, I think the biopharmaceutical industry will play a very major role as we move forward. Pfizer is one of the largest biopharmaceutical companies in the world."

Pfizer has reported directly spending \$9 million to lobby Capitol Hill last year, in addition to \$2.5 million for outside lobbying firms. Burg concentrates on Senate Democrats on a variety of issues such the development of new vaccines, curbing coun-



terfeit drugs and the protection of intellectual property.

Burg got her start on the Hill in 2000 as a junior aide to **Karen L. Thurman**, a House Ways and Means Committee Democrat from Florida who represented the area around the University of Florida in Gainesville, where Burg earned undergraduate and graduate degrees. From 2003 to 2005, Burg was a senior legislative assistant to Rep. **Brian Baird**, a Washington state Democrat. She completed a master's in business administration from the university before joining Murray's staff in 2007 as a senior policy adviser for health policy and budget issues.

— KRISTIN COYNER

## TECHNOLOGY

## Robert Hoffman

THE LEAD LOBBYIST for the Information Technology Industry Council, **Robert Hoffman**, has left the trade group for one of its member companies, Motorola Solutions Inc., where he is corporate vice president and leader of global government affairs.

"It's very clear that this is a company that understands the importance of government affairs," says Hoffman, "both for its corporate interests but also its business development interests, particularly since the government is a critical partner and customer for Motorola."

Hoffman, 48, was previously a lobbyist for Cognizant Technology Solutions and for Oracle. He worked for three Senate Republicans from the late 1980s to 2001, including **Pete Wilson** of California, **Larry Pressler** of South Dakota and **Mike DeWine** of Ohio. From 1993



to 1995 Hoffman was Washington deputy director for Wilson when he was governor.

## Craig Albright

A new addition to the staff of BSA: The Software Alliance is former House Republican aide and White House legislative affairs liaison **Craig Albright**, who is now vice president for legislative strategy.

For the past four years, Albright was a special representative at the World Bank, and helped manage outreach in donor countries including the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Israel.

"I like the idea of being at an association," says Albright, "because they are in many ways the drivers of issues. They can sort of be the pointy end of the spear."

During President **George W. Bush's** second term, Albright, 41, was a legislative affairs aide to Vice President **Dick Cheney** and then a legislative liaison for Bush. After that he was a chief of staff to House Republicans **Joe Knollenberg** of Michigan and **Kay Granger** of Texas.

## FINANCIAL SERVICES

## Dan LaBert

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of Consumer Bankruptcy Attorneys has hired **Dan LaBert**, the former executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants, as its executive director. From 2007 to 2012, LaBert was executive director of the Bar Association of Lehigh Valley in Allentown, Pa.

Earlier in his career, he was executive director of the Leadership Institute, a Northern Virginia organization that trains conservative activists, though he says that bankruptcy "is not a Republican or a Democratic issue."

"With the economy tanking the way it has over the last few years, people lose everything," he says. "This was an opportunity to combine my political experience with my association experience to advocate for an issue that's real life to hundreds of thousands of Americans."



From 2004 to 2007, LaBert was senior director of creative services for a PBS station in eastern Pennsylvania.

## Scott Talbott

AFTER TWO DECADES as a lobbyist for the Financial Services Roundtable, **Scott Talbott** left last year during a shakeup that followed the 2012 appointment of former Minnesota Gov. **Tim Pawlenty** as the roundtable's CEO. Talbott recently joined the Electronic Transactions Association as senior vice president for government relations.

The trade group for companies that process mobile payments is lobbying Congress for a federal standard that would require companies to disclose data breaches.

"Right now 46 different states have a patchwork of different notification laws," says Talbott, 46. "We want one federal law."

## Ben Veghte

THE NATIONAL VENTURE Capital Association has hired former Republican House aide **Ben Veghte** as vice president of communications. For the past year and a half Veghte was a director of strategic communications at the Glover Park Group, a bipartisan communications and lobbying firm.

Before that, Veghte, 31, was communications director for Republican Rep. **Scott Garrett** of New Jersey and an aide for the McCain-Palin presidential campaign in 2012 and communications director for the Securities Industry and Financial Markets Association.