

For more background on Kristin McCowan: from the July 23rd *Santa Monica Daily Press*:

“After amassing years of political experience in Washington, McCowan said in an interview Tuesday she first became interested in politics as a young child growing up in the Pico neighborhood. “I’m very much a product of the environment in which I was raised, so although my parents weren’t politically active people themselves — (they were engaged community members) — I was always politically interested... so from a very young age, I would get involved in local elections and door knock and stuff like that,” McCowan said. “And then when I decided that I was going to transition to D.C., it became clear to me that I really liked the role of being behind the scenes and supporting.”

Now, the mother of two children has the hindsight and political appointments to know she made the correct decision but McCowan wasn’t always sure she belonged on Capitol Hill. “We’ve seen, you know, over the years, a lot of ugliness in our political environment, so I hesitated a couple of times but then when I made the decision to move to D.C. — specifically when I made the decision to go into public service as an aide on Capitol Hill — that was because I felt that you had to earn your right to be at the table making policy, so I wanted to understand where it was made and sort of worked my way up there,” McCowan said as she detailed how she found herself working on the House Administration Committee led by Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald. “I didn’t totally understand as a 24-year-old that this was the right place for my personality type. But then I came to realize I actually like operations; I like process; I like personnel issues; I like oversight and good governance; I like funding and figuring out how to make budgets work, and the committee dealt with a lot of that in addition to really interesting things like federal election law and protecting elections and voter rights,” McCowan said. “And that was stuff that I’d only have very little experience with since I’d always been a poll worker since I turned 18 here in Santa Monica... so it was really the right place for me and it opened my eyes to the importance of good oversight of policy.”

After five years of Washington, “it was time to move back home,” McCowan said, describing how she enrolled at USC in an attempt to receive her Master’s degree in public administration and gain a better understanding of the theories behind the practical experience that she had. “That was a great education and opportunity because ‘SC did focus a lot on local government and state government, so I thought that was very beneficial.”

Again, looking to put theory in practice, McCowan hit the ground to work on campaigns for a couple of years until her engagement with the Obama administration led her back to Washington to help serve the president in his second term. McCowan said her time with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, meant a great deal to her because she realized that even the slightest changes can have a big impact. “I left FEMA to go work at the White House,” and assist with the transition to the next president, McCowan said. “So, I was able to do that for a couple of years and it was a really eyeopening experience as well and one that I think prepared me for this role because you have to learn there quickly.” “You don’t have a lot of time to get your feet

wet, and you just sort of have to hit the ground running,” McCowan added, sharing how some staffers are deeply entrenched in their views of how everything should go. “And I had to go in and take charge as this new person, which in some ways is very similar to (coming onto the council).”

While noting she returned to her birthplace for a myriad of reasons, including a family tragedy, McCowan said, “I had always had this dream of when I did have children — I would want to raise them in the community that I was raised in specifically, because even though there were struggles and things that I had to deal with that were uncomfortable, I still felt that this community left a positive enough taste in my mouth about what I was capable of being. And that confidence, I feel, is so important.”

As the matriarch of a family consisting of a Cuban-American husband and two biracial children, McCowan said she can relate to the feelings of constituents throughout the community, and like many others, “I think everything that happened on May 31, really opened my eyes and embarrassed me, frankly.”

But this is a critical moment in the city’s history, and McCowan believes Santa Monica’s younger generation has an opportunity to lead the Westside into the future. “We need to communicate more effectively our empathy as well as what we’re doing to make lives of our local Santa Monicans better,” McCowan said. “but we also need to stand up for our core values. That’s what I’m here to do, and I think where I come from and who I am is really going to help me to do that.” [Brennon@smdp.com](mailto:Brennon@smdp.com)