

JESS O'CONNELL

b. June 9, 1973

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC STRATEGIST

“Every single day we are witnessing unprecedented activism and excitement across our nation.”

She was the first openly LGBT CEO of the Democratic National Committee.

Jess O'Connell is a national political strategist who works to advance progressive candidates, policies and organizations. She was the executive director of Emily's List and the first openly LGBT CEO of the Democratic National Committee (DNC).

O'Connell grew up in Phoenix, Arizona. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder and graduated with an MBA from the University of Denver, Daniels College of Business. When she was in high school in the 1980s, O'Connell lost a family friend to AIDS. Her first job was in HIV/AIDS activism, where

she dealt with issues of LGBT health and poverty. In 2000 she became the first female director of AIDS Walk Colorado, a program of the Colorado AIDS Project.

In 2003 O'Connell joined Emily's List as deputy director of major gifts and events. Emily's List is the largest organization in the United States working to elect pro-choice Democratic women. She subsequently worked as development director of the Children's Defense Fund and on Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign.

In 2007 O'Connell became the national director of operations for Senator Hillary Clinton's first presidential campaign. She grew the staff from a handful of workers to 1,500 at more than 400 offices across the country.

In 2011, after holding senior positions at the ONE Campaign and the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, O'Connell became the chief of staff and senior vice president of the Center for American Progress (CAP), the preeminent organization that researches and implements progressive ideas and policies. Three years later, she returned to Emily's List as executive director.

Following the 2016 elections, O'Connell became the first openly LGBT CEO of the DNC, where she oversaw a significant reorganization and revitalization effort. During her tenure, Democrats won 36 state legislature flips from red to blue and record-breaking victories in New Jersey, Virginia and Alabama. After less than a year, she announced her departure, saying, "I'm proud to have helped to rebuild our party." DNC Chairman Tom Perez told the Washington Post that O'Connell took the position when the Democrats "needed her most." He said, "Her leadership brought a laser-like focus on winning elections."

O'Connell went on to serve as senior advisor to Pete Buttigieg's presidential campaign. She led the early states strategy, resulting in Buttigieg's history-making first-place finish in Iowa and second-place finish in New Hampshire during the 2020 primaries. Thereafter, she became the cofounder and partner at NEWCO Strategies, a majority women/majority LGBT-owned consulting firm. Most recently, she was the lead organizer of the National COVID-19 Remembrance, October 4, 2020, at the Ellipse, a park between the National Mall and the White House.

O'Connell has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, NPR and other media outlets. She lives in Maryland with her wife, Holly, and their son.



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