

People

■ Hill People



HONATZU

Ron Bonjean is set to leave Capitol Hill in February. He most recently was the chief of staff to Senate Republican Conference Chairman **Jon Kyl**, R-Ariz., and is helping Sen. **Lamar Alexander**, R-Tenn., make the transition to conference chair. Bonjean will then explore his options in the private sector, after serving as a key staffer for the Republican leadership for six years. Before joining Kyl's office, he was a spokesman for then-House Speaker **Dennis Hastert**, R-Ill. He was also press secretary for then-Senate Majority Leader **Trent Lott**, R-Miss., giving him the rare experience of working for both the House and the Senate leadership. "I've been honored to have had a front-row seat to national history," says Bonjean, 37.

The leadership jobs were different, he says, because of each body's rules. The House was "very interesting, because you were trying to put coalitions together to get the votes right away," Bonjean says. "In the Senate, you're trying to put together a compromise just to get the bill to the floor."

His Hill jobs also required considerable crisis-management skills. Bonjean was in Lott's office when the majority leader made his controversial comments at **Strom Thurmond's** 100th birthday party in 2002, and he was working for Hastert during the **Mark Foley** page scandal. Bonjean hopes to parlay his experience with legislative fights and media crises into a successful post-government career. "My skin grew a few inches thicker, and I sure learned a whole lot." Although he has yet to decide on a specific destination, Bonjean plans to delve into crisis communications and government-relations work. Part of the reason he is leaving the Hill is personal: In June, Bonjean will marry **Sara Rose**, who is events director at the Republican National Committee.

Bonjean was born in Illinois and grew up in Milwaukee, where his parents still live. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin (Madison) in 1993 and started on the Hill as an intern for then-Rep. **Jay Kim**, R-Calif. Bonjean later worked for **Jim Longley**, R-Maine, **Kay Granger**, R-Texas, **Michael Castle**, R-Del., and **J.C. Watts**, R-Okla. He also did a stint with then-Commerce Secretary **Donald Evans**.

Despite all the stress that comes with high-stakes battles in Congress, Bonjean has found an outlet: He recently earned his black belt in tae kwon do.

—Gregg Sangillo