

Joe Cunningham

U.S. Representative for South Carolina's 1st Congressional District, 2018-2020

Former United States Congressman Joe Cunningham was born in Princeton, Kentucky on May 26, 1982 to former Kentucky Supreme Court Justice Bill Cunningham and Paula Cunningham.

He attended the College of Charleston before graduating from Florida Atlantic University with a Bachelor of Science in Ocean Engineering. After graduation, he worked for a marine and environmental consulting firm in Naples, Florida for five years before pursuing his lifelong goal of becoming a lawyer. In 2014, he graduated from Northern Kentucky University's Salmon P. Chase College of Law, where he also served as the national Vice President of the Student Bar Association.

After passing the bar, Joe moved back to Charleston where he began practicing construction law at a downtown firm.

In 2018, he became the first Democrat to be elected to South Carolina's First Congressional District in over 40 years. The Charleston Post and Courier called his victory the "biggest upset in modern South Carolina history."

During his two-year term in office, Cunningham was widely recognized for his "people-first" approach to legislating. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce ranked him the 4th most bipartisan member of Congress and endorsed him in his re-election effort. The bipartisan Lugar Center ranked him as the most bipartisan freshman in the House in 2019. Delivering on a campaign promise to put "people over politics," he made constituent services a bedrock of his tenure in Congress and his Congressional office closed more cases than any other freshman House Democrat.

Cunningham served on the Veterans Affairs and Natural Resources Committees where he passed two bills into law in his first term, including the Veterans Tele-hearing Modernization Act and the Great American Outdoors Act. In 2019, Joe delivered on another signature campaign promise when the House passed his bipartisan bill banning offshore drilling.

Cunningham was unafraid to make legislative points in creative ways. In 2019, he blew an airhorn in a Natural Resources subcommittee hearing to highlight the dangers of seismic airgun blasting to sea life. In his farewell speech in December of 2020, he became the first known member in Congressional history to crack a beer on the House floor in a toast to bipartisanship and cooperation. The video of Cunningham's farewell speech has been viewed over 1 million times.

Even in defeat, Cunningham still enjoyed significant crossover support in his district. He lost his reelection bid by only 1% of the vote in a district that Joe Biden lost by 6%.

Since leaving Congress, Cunningham has returned to practicing law in Charleston and spending time with his son, Boone.