

Clay Pell has dedicated his career to public service and making a difference in the lives of people. As the grandson of the late U.S. Senator Claiborne Pell, his dedication to public service is deeply rooted. He believes Rhode Island needs a problem solver who can spur growth and link Rhode Island's economy and students to 21st century opportunities.

After law school, Clay joined the Coast Guard, like his father and grandfather before him. As an officer in a service devoted to helping people and saving lives, Clay had the privilege of leading men and women in uniform. He represented the government as a prosecutor in military courtrooms, and also as a liaison with foreign military personnel from around the world.

Clay then joined President Obama's national security team, serving as director for strategic planning. It was Clay's job to bring together stakeholders across the federal government – from the Department of Defense to the Department of Education – and look holistically at opportunities for their engagement in foreign policy and national security, during a time of competing priorities, challenges and very limited resources.

The president then appointed Clay deputy assistant secretary at the Department of Education. There he led the U.S. government's efforts to equip America's students with the language and international education opportunities they need to succeed in the world economy.

Clay graduated first in his class from the Coast Guard Direct Commission Officer School, earned his J.D. from Georgetown University, and graduated from Harvard College with high honors in Social Studies and a Citation in Modern Standard Arabic. Clay is a recipient of the Defense Meritorious Service Medal and the Coast Guard Achievement Medal. He studied law in China and Argentina and has studied Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic.

Clay continues to drill as a member of the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve in East Providence. He resides in Providence with his wife, Michelle Kwan.