

# Representation Matters:

## WOMEN IN THE U.S. CONGRESS



**CAWP**  
CENTER FOR AMERICAN  
WOMEN AND POLITICS

**RUTGERS**  
Eagleton Institute of Politics

 Political Parity

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## About the Center for American Women and Politics

The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) is a university-based research, education and public service center. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's changing relationship to politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. A unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, CAWP is a leading authority in its field and a respected bridge between the academic and political worlds. [www.cawp.rutgers.edu](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu)

## About the Eagleton Institute of Politics

The Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University links the study of politics with its day-to-day practice. Exploring state and national politics through research, education, and public service, the Institute focuses attention on how American politics and government work, how they change, and how they can be improved. Eagleton programs contribute to more effective, ethical governance; broader representation; and a better informed and actively engaged citizenry. [www.eagleton.rutgers.edu](http://www.eagleton.rutgers.edu)

## About Political Parity

Political Parity is a nonpartisan platform accelerating the energies of dedicated leaders, researchers, and funders changing the face of US politics. Adding more women to national political office is not just a matter of representation - with low Congressional approval, it's our best chance to break the gridlock in Washington. As this research shows, women bring a broad perspective to policymaking and wield a more collaborative approach than men alone. We look forward to thoughtfully engaging leading voices with this final project to serve as a lasting contribution to the advancement of women's political leadership.

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# Representation Matters: Women in the U.S. Congress

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A century after the first woman to win election to the U.S. Congress, Jeannette Rankin, took her seat in the House of Representatives, women remain underrepresented in the nation's legislature with women constituting just 19.4% of members of Congress in 2017—below the worldwide average for national governing bodies. Moreover, the importance of having women serving in Congress is still not fully appreciated or understood. In order to document women's contributions to governing and understand how women are navigating the contemporary environment of party polarization, the Center for American Women and Politics, with generous support from Political Parity (the Hunt Alternatives Fund), embarked on a major research study of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.

The women who served in the House and Senate in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress (2015-16) confronted a difficult political environment in which to achieve legislative success. The 114<sup>th</sup> Congress was widely perceived to be characterized by sharp partisan divisions and legislative gridlock. Although both houses of Congress were controlled by Republicans, the Democrats maintained control of the presidency, making it difficult for either party to push through its agenda. Historically, fewer major bills are passed and enacted during presidential election years, and the second year of the two-year session witnessed a highly contentious campaign for the presidency and for control of the U.S. Senate.

At the time of our study—the CAWP Study of Women in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress—only 20 women served in the Senate and 84 in the House. Although their numbers were small, even more problematic for their influence was their party distribution and institutional position. The presence of women was much more heavily concentrated in the party out of power. Women constituted fewer than 10 percent of all Republican legislators across the two chambers, with six women senators and 22 representatives. Women were much better represented on the other side of the aisle, constituting about one-third of all Democrats, with 14 women senators and 62 representatives.

Yet what we find in our research—based on interviews with 83 of the 108 women who served as Senators, Representatives, and Delegates—is that the women on both sides of the aisle in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress very much believe that their presence and their voices mattered, and they provided considerable evidence of achievements despite the overall environment of gridlock and party polarization in which they operated. They shared example after example of working on bipartisan legislation with other members of Congress, both women and men. A majority of the women we interviewed believe that women are more likely than their male counterparts to work across party lines. Large numbers of congresswomen express the belief that women are

more consensual and collaborative than their male colleagues, and in interview after interview—in different ways using different words—they explained that women are more results-oriented, more likely to emphasize achievement over ego, and more concerned with achieving policy outcomes rather than receiving publicity or credit. Our interviews revealed that a shared work style, common experiences as women, and personal relationships forged in single-sex spaces within Congress enable women to work together across party lines. Women of color—who constituted a record number of members in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress—emphasized the significance of their presence in Congress and the imperative of including the perspectives of women of color and minority communities more generally in the policymaking process.

Most women in Congress take great pride in being female in a male-dominated institution and recognize that their presence is symbolically and substantively important to other women—a sentiment that transcends partisan, ideological, racial/ethnic, and chamber differences. They see themselves as bringing distinctive perspectives to the work they do as congresswomen by placing issues related to women’s lives on the congressional agenda, employing a gender lens and bringing their life experiences to bear on a wide variety of policy issues, and being a voice for the voiceless by representing those who otherwise might not be well represented in the halls of Congress.

Almost all the women we interviewed want to see more women join them in the nation’s legislature, and many claim that the gender-related obstacles to getting to Congress are greater than the challenges women face once they are elected. The findings of this report help make a strong case for confronting those obstacles, demonstrating the value of electing more women to legislative office. First, electing more people who seek to get things done can help break through gridlock. And for most of the women we interviewed, their motivation in running for and serving in elected office is rooted in seeing results. Second, women bring perspectives, priorities, and agendas that would be missing if women were not there to represent women and give voice to those who are too often left out of policymaking spaces. Not only women’s differences from men, but also the diversity that exists among women—in experience, voice, perspective, and position—points to the need for having more women in Congress. The value of racial, ethnic and partisan diversity is illustrated in congresswomen’s comments and behaviors, reaffirming that representativeness among women requires attention and efforts to promote diversity among women candidates and officeholders. Finally, women in Congress are undeterred by the challenges they confront—whether the challenges be gender-based or not—in doing their jobs. There was no shortage of resilience expressed among the congresswomen we interviewed, and there was determination to succeed on behalf of those for whom they give voice in the House and Senate every day.

## AMONG THE MAJOR FINDINGS OF OUR RESEARCH:

### Representation and Motivation

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- Women in Congress are committed first and foremost to representing their districts or states, including constituents who did not vote for them. Women members are elected from a wide range of districts and states geographically. Because the areas women represent vary greatly, so too do the key district-based interests or groups to which they devote legislative attention.
- Many African American and Latina congresswomen see representing Black and Latino communities as an important component of their jobs as representatives. Asian American and Non-Hispanic white women whose districts include ethnically diverse populations also express a commitment to represent specific ethnic groups.
- Personal experiences and identities—including professional and occupational experiences; adult life experiences outside the workplace; experiences growing up; and racial, ethnic, and sexual identities—influence congresswomen’s legislative priorities and representational responsibilities.
- A number of women see themselves as a “voice for the voiceless,” representing children, the economically disadvantaged, immigrants, people of color, the unborn, and others whose interests have not been adequately represented in Congress.

### Representing Women

- Women members of Congress bring to the congressional agenda new issues related to women’s lives, seek prioritization of them, and are persistent in their work to keep them on the agenda.
- Almost all believe women also bring different perspectives than men to their work in Congress because of their life experiences. They bring to bear a gender lens on various issues, not just issues that might commonly be considered women’s issues.
- The multiple identities and experiences that women bring to Congress are equally important to, and are often inseparable from, gender in shaping the ways in which women influence institutional processes, priorities, and outcomes.
- The most common perspective that women members of both parties see themselves bringing as women is that of mother or caregiver. Numerous women pointed to their societal roles—as mothers, grandmothers, daughters—and their shared life experiences, often in those roles, as sources of their ability to represent women and bring distinctive perspectives to bear on their congressional work.
- While women members of both parties display passion for and claim credibility on issues that most directly affect women, their ideological divides can often lead them to advocate very different policy positions and prescriptions on these issues. This dynamic is especially evident in the area of reproductive rights. Partisanship shapes how, not whether, women influence the agenda, conversation, and institution as women.
- Most women of color argue that they bring unique perspectives to congressional deliberation and policymaking rather than a distinctive policy agenda.

## Representing in an Era of Party Polarization

- The environment of partisan polarization affects both women and men in Congress and has significantly reduced opportunities for bipartisan cooperation. This difficult context means that women's bipartisan collaborations are even more noteworthy.
- A majority of women in Congress believe that women are more likely than their male colleagues to work across party lines. Women's greater bipartisan proclivity was attributed to factors such as being a woman in a male-dominated institution, a distinctive work style on the part of women, and different pathways to Congress that give rise to differences in legislative style.
- According to the congresswomen, collaboration by women across party lines is often fostered by participation in bipartisan, single-sex activities such as dinners, the congressional women's softball team, the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues (CCWI), and travel. These activities help to build relationships across party lines which can lead to policy collaboration.
- Large numbers of congresswomen claim that women are more results-oriented, that they emphasize achievement over ego, and that they are more concerned with achieving policy outcomes than receiving publicity or credit. Many also express the belief that women are more consensual and collaborative than their male colleagues.

## Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Women

- Women of color, who hold a record number of seats in Congress, take pride in their constituencies and see themselves as powerful and effective actors within Congress. Women of color in Congress argued that they bring important perspectives into the legislative process. Their presence can also educate colleagues about their communities.
- Women of color serving in Congress seek to bring minority voices into the policy process. But they also emphasized the breadth of the issues that they work on.
- Women of color offer perspectives reflecting the intersection of race and gender that are distinct from those of white women and men of color. Some note specifically the existence of gender, regional, and ethnic differences operating within racial categories.

## Women in Leadership

- House Democratic women speak with pride about Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's accomplishments and the significance of her achievements as the first female speaker of the House. They credit her with creating opportunities for women in the caucus and elevating women to positions of leadership.
- Although only two Republican women served as standing committee chairs in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, Republican women note the significant role they play within the Republican conference.<sup>1</sup>
- Women in the Senate also note the vital roles women play in both parties and across committees.

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1 In the U.S. Senate, only Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) chaired a standing committee (Energy and Natural Resources) in the 114th Congress. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) chaired the Special Committee on Aging. Representative Candice Miller (R-MI) was the only Republican woman to chair a House standing committee (Administration). For a complete listing of women in congressional leadership positions in the 114th Congress, see [www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/conglead-hist.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/conglead-hist.pdf).

## Challenges and Opportunities to Being Women in Congress

- Many women express the belief that the challenges of campaigning and getting to office are greater for women than are the challenges women face once elected. Gender differences in supportive campaign infrastructure and the standards by which candidates are evaluated were among the top challenges women identified.
- Nevertheless, within Congress, many women note that they must work harder to prove they belong, and they struggle to be heard on all issues and in all congressional spaces. They still are too often evaluated on style over substance and face greater challenges than men in meeting the conflicting demands of work and family.
- Some women of color express specific concerns about being heard and respected within their party, but also note their effectiveness in claiming and exercising their power.
- Women across chamber, party, and race and ethnicity see their lack of greater numbers as a major challenge. Not just the differences between women and men, but also the diversity that exists among women—in experience, voice, perspective, and position—point to the need for having more women in Congress.
- Women from both parties note that there are times when their underrepresentation affords them opportunities in settings and during debates where their parties are cognizant of the need for gender diversity and inclusion.
- But women in Congress also see their ability to inspire and encourage more women to run for office as perhaps their major opportunity. This sentiment transcends party, racial/ethnic, and chamber lines. Women in Congress view themselves as role models for women and girls, and they are actively engaged in encouraging other women to become politically involved. They hope to see more women join their ranks.



# Introduction

When Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) took to the floor on Tuesday, January 26, 2016, she noted that something was “genuinely different” about the chamber. “As we convene this morning, you look around the chamber,” she observed, “The presiding officer is female. All of our parliamentarians are female. Our floor managers are female. All of our pages are female.” Due to a blizzard, very few members made it to work that day, leaving Murkowski and Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) alone with the women on staff. Asked to explain the gender disparity in who showed up that day, Murkowski posited, “Perhaps it speaks to the hardiness of women - that put on your boots and put your hat on and get out and slog through the mess that’s out there.” Perhaps that hardiness is evident not just in women’s journey—whether literal or figurative—to the U.S. Congress, but also in the way they navigate an institution long dominated by men and frequently characterized as broken.

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Women members on both sides of the aisle very much believe that their presence and their voices matter.

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In this report, we take stock of the experiences, perspectives, approaches, and influence of women in a polarized, as well as male-dominated, U.S. Congress. Drawing upon the CAWP Study of Women in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, entailing original interviews with 83 of the 108 women who served as Senators, Representatives, and Delegates in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress (2015-2016), we show that women members on both sides of the aisle very much believe that their presence and their voices matter. Our interviews provide considerable evidence of women’s achievements and significance despite the overall environment of gridlock and party polarization in which they operate. Their successes may stem from women’s distinctive approach to congressional work, according to the women we interviewed. A majority believe that women are more likely than their male counterparts to work across party lines to get things done, and virtually all provided examples of working on bipartisan legislation with both men and women in Congress. Many contend that women are more results-oriented, more likely to emphasize achievement over ego, and more concerned with achieving policy outcomes rather than receiving publicity or credit.

Women, they argue, bring distinctive perspectives to their legislative work by placing issues related to women’s lives on the congressional agenda, employing a gender lens and bringing their life experiences to bear on a wide variety of policy issues, and being a voice for the voiceless through representing those who otherwise might not be well represented in the halls of Congress. Importantly, they bring the multiplicity of their life experiences into congressional debates, demonstrating the importance of racial and ethnic, as well as ideological, diversity among women members. For many women members, racial and partisan identities are equally important to, and inseparable from gender in shaping their experiences in and contributions to the House and the Senate. Finally, most congresswomen take great pride in being female in a male-dominated institution and argue that their presence is symbolically and substantively important to other women. They express a desire to see more women join them in the nation’s

legislature, and many claim that the gender-related obstacles to getting to Congress are greater than the challenges women face once they are elected. The findings of this report make a strong case for confronting those obstacles, demonstrating the value of electing more women—in all their diversity—to legislative office.

## Context for the Study

Women constituted only 19.4 percent of all members of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, with 20 women in the Senate and 84 in the House.<sup>2</sup> Although their numbers were small, even more problematic for influence was their party distribution and institutional position. The presence of women was much more heavily concentrated in the party out of power. Women constituted fewer than 10 percent of all Republican members across the two chambers, with six women senators and 22 women representatives. Women were much better represented on the other side of the aisle, constituting about one-third of all Democrats, with 14 women senators and 62 representatives.

While both houses of Congress were controlled by Republicans from 2015 to 2016, the Democrats maintained control of the presidency, making it difficult for either party to push through its agenda. While more laws were enacted between 2015 and 2016 than in the previous two sessions of Congress, the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress still ranks fourth worst in productivity out of the last 14 congresses.<sup>3</sup> Historically, fewer major bills are passed and enacted during presidential election years, and the second year of the two-year session witnessed a highly contentious campaign for the presidency and for control of the U.S. Senate.

One hundred years have transpired since the first woman took her seat in the U.S. Congress. Today, the United States lags behind a large number of nations in the numeric representation of women in its national legislature, and the importance of having women serving in Congress is still not fully appreciated or understood. Women members of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress emphasize the importance of their presence and their ability to affect outcomes within the current political environment, suggesting that the case for expanding women's representation is strong, and that perhaps the "hardiness of women" cited by Senator Murkowski is at play in the everyday work of the U.S. Congress.

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2 In addition, 4 women served as delegates. This does not include Representative Colleen Hanabusa (D-HI), who was sworn in on November 14, 2016, after winning a special election to fill a vacant House seat.

3 Quorum, "Congressional Productivity Increases in 114th Congress, But Lags Behind Historical Averages," December 20, 2016, [info.quorum.us/114th-congressional-productivity-numbers-press-release](http://info.quorum.us/114th-congressional-productivity-numbers-press-release)

# Representation and Motivation

Representation is the primary responsibility of any member of Congress. First and foremost,

voters send officials to Washington to act on their behalf and enact policy that will further their interests. In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how women members of Congress perceived their representational responsibilities, we asked each woman we interviewed whether, in addition to representing her district as a whole, there are particular people or interests inside or outside her district that she feels a commitment to work on behalf of in Congress. In their answers to this question, along with additional information they provided over the course of their interviews, women members cite three primary motivations behind their representational behavior: district-based interests and demands; personal experiences and identities; and being a voice for the voiceless. Often, these forces interact. Many women of color represent majority-minority districts in which their own racial identities and experiences overlap with many of their constituents. And women members' impetus to give voice to the voiceless cannot be wholly separated from women's historical marginalization from political power.

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Women in Congress are committed first and foremost to representing their districts or states, including constituents who did not vote for them.

"... the people who elect me come first and foremost. And not just the people who elect me, but everybody who lives in my district, whether they vote or not, whether they're capable of voting or not.... If we were only going for voters, for example, we would never do anything for kids [since] by definition they can't vote."

REPRESENTATIVE LORETTA SANCHEZ (D-CA)

"...when you get elected to public office, you represent basically everyone who lives or has an interest in your district. It's funny because sometimes I'll run into someone or I'll meet them and they will say, 'Well I didn't vote for you, so I'm not sure you want to hear what I have to say.' And I'll say, 'You know, it doesn't matter if somebody votes for me or they support all my ideas.'...it's sort of like I love all my children equally."

REPRESENTATIVE CHELLIE PINGREE (D-ME)

Women members are elected from a wide range of districts and states geographically. Because the areas they represent vary greatly, so too do the key district-based interests or groups to which they devote legislative attention.

“I have a lot of agriculture in my district. So... while I’m not on the Agriculture Committee ... I’m constantly making sure that North Country farmers have a seat at the table when we’re discussing agriculture policies.”

REPRESENTATIVE ELISE STEFANIK (R-NY)

“I am a very passionate long-time leader in Great Lakes issues, for instance. We have 20 percent of the world’s fresh water... around our state, and it’s really our way of life as well as about our economy. So I am deeply involved in that.”

SENATOR DEBBIE STABENOW (D-MI)

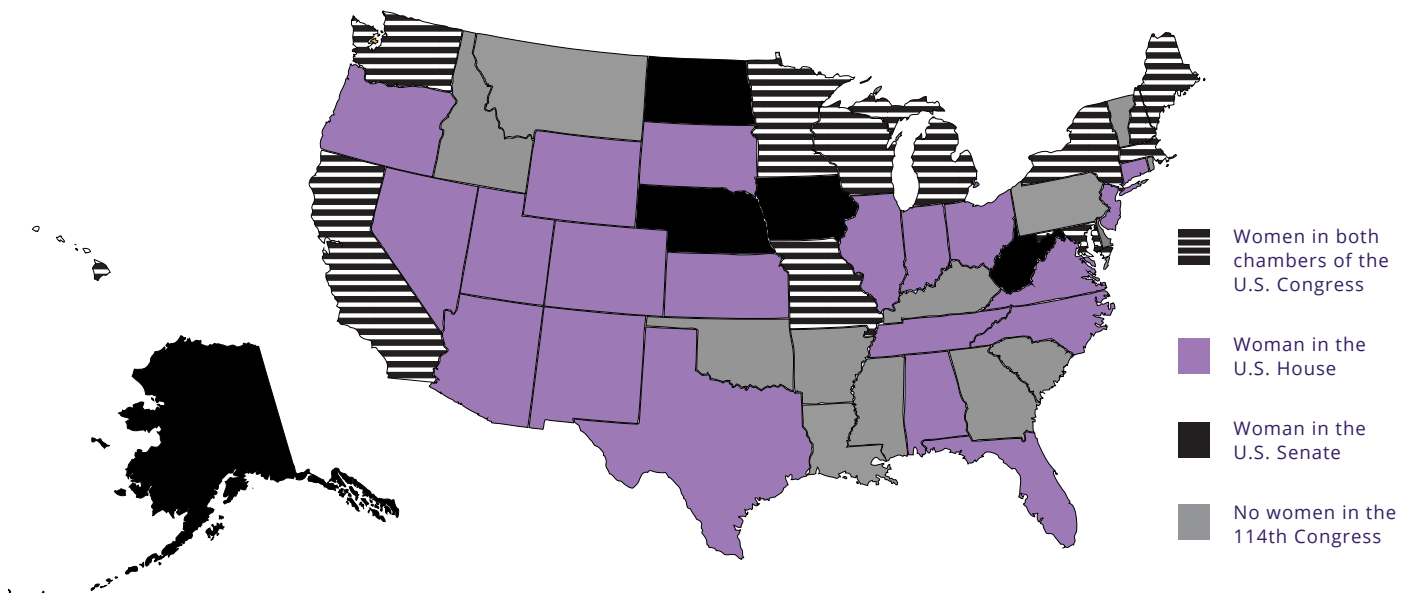
“St. Louis—and I represent the suburbs of St. Louis— is a big financial service sector.... They call it the Wall Street of the West... [It is] home base to great companies like Wells Fargo, Edward Jones, Stifel Nicolaus, Scottrade, a lot of insurance and banking industries.”

REPRESENTATIVE ANN WAGNER (R-MO)

“I represent Fort Bragg, so national defense, national security... issues with our military, military families, and our veterans are very, very important.”

REPRESENTATIVE RENEE ELLMERS (R-NC)

### Women Members of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress



Many African American and Latina congresswomen see representing Black and Latino communities as an important component of their jobs as representatives. Asian American and Non-Hispanic white women whose districts include ethnically diverse populations also express a commitment to represent specific ethnic groups.

"I have a very, very high unemployment rate. I have schools that are struggling every day. So... most of us [the Black women in Congress] represent people of color, and we represent poorer communities. We represent more diverse communities, and so yes, we have very different priorities. Now I happen to represent a very diverse district, but the largest portion of my district is minority and poor."

REPRESENTATIVE MARCIA FUDGE (D-OH)

"I grew up in the 7th District. It includes the cities of Birmingham, Selma... Montgomery and Tuscaloosa, so in many ways it is the civil rights district. And so... I obviously represent and stand on the shoulders of those who came before me.... The median income for a family of four in my district is \$32,000.... And so the issues that I champion everyday are job creation and economic development and making sure that my district has the resources and the opportunities that allow people to get out of that cycle of poverty."

REPRESENTATIVE TERRI SEWELL (D-AL)

"I represent a district that is majority Hispanic....[C]onstituent service work is very important to me because a lot of these folks... come from Colombia, ...Nicaragua, Venezuela, Brazil and we do a lot of immigration constituent work."

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

"With both the Latino and the Asian population [in my district] I've worked on immigration, and in fact my greatest goal in coming to Congress in 2009 was to bring about comprehensive immigration reform... And I've been very, very active on civil rights issues, in voting rights. I know how important that is to everybody, but especially the African American population."

REPRESENTATIVE JUDY CHU (D-CA)

"I've been very involved, in part because North Dakota has one of the highest percentages of Native Americans. And I've spent a lot of time working in Indian country both in public life and private life [and consequently] feel a lot of sense of urgency to address a lot of those issues."

SENATOR HEIDI HEITKAMP (D-ND)

"[I have] a very ethnically diverse district, so I'm very much involved in the immigration issues.... I feel a real obligation to help people who are here as immigrants."

REPRESENTATIVE DINA TITUS (D-NV)

"I've got one of the largest Arab American communities in the country."

REPRESENTATIVE DEBBIE DINGELL (D-MI)

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Personal experiences and identities—including professional and occupational experiences; adult life experiences outside the workplace; experiences growing up; and racial, ethnic, and sexual identities— influence congresswomen’s legislative priorities and representational responsibilities.

## PROFESSIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL EXPERIENCES

“I feel that I have two main roles here. One is to be a strong advocate for my district and fight for what matters to them, but also be a strong voice for our military, for national security, for taking care of veterans. It is a part of my background, it comes with the obligation, with the experience and the expertise that I have, and it’s obviously also a passion of mine. We have to make sure we keep our country safe, that we give our troops everything they need in order to do that, and that we take care of them once they are no longer serving.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARTHA MCSALLY (R-AZ)

“My background is public health—nursing...and I had to push for women and heart disease.... Women experience heart disease, as one example, very differently from men.”

REPRESENTATIVE LOIS CAPPAS (D-CA)

“I have been involved my entire career, in many ways, with the criminal justice system, and once arriving here have found an opportunity to get really involved in substance abuse issues and mental health issues. And so I’ve been trying to introduce some legislation but am also trying to speak about it as much as I can... [I am] a former criminal defense attorney, and then I was the deputy mayor in Indianapolis, where I worked with the police department, and then I was U.S. Attorney in the Bush administration. And all of those times during my career I’ve seen substance abuse and addiction, whether it is alcohol or drugs, has just had a devastating impact on individuals and on families and communities.”

REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN BROOKS (R-IN)

“I am really fortunate in that I came to this office from an auditor’s office, and before that [I was] a prosecutor. So I enjoy investigations that lead to effective oversight, because an auditor’s job is an oversight job and a prosecutor’s job is about developing the facts to support a certain action. And so an oversight role in the Senate is very similar to kind of a hybrid between a prosecutor and an auditor. So I am very comfortable in that space; I enjoy that space.”

SENATOR CLAIRE MCCASKILL (D-MO)

“I’m proud to come from a manufacturing background, so I think I have a responsibility to be a voice for manufacturing.”

REPRESENTATIVE DEBBIE DINGELL (D-MI)

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

“... I lived on food stamps and public assistance, single mother and all that stuff, which...is kind of normal for a lot of women living in this country... And so I bring, like other black women bring and other women of color bring, whatever they went through and the barriers they faced, [and I’m] trying to knock down some of those to make things better for everybody.”

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE (D-CA)

“I find that representatives all are a product of our own experiences, too.... that does influence [us] at times because our experiences often drive our passions.... [I have] a child with special needs. And that has... not only introduced me to the disabilities community, but... I want to make sure that I’m giving... those issues a priority in Congress.”

REPRESENTATIVE CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS (R- WA)

“I’m a breast cancer survivor.... I’ve subsequently had... a great relationship and affiliation and affinity towards breast cancer organizations.”

REPRESENTATIVE DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ (D-FL)

“Well, I certainly feel a commitment to working on behalf of the people who serve in the military. It’s probably born more of the fact that I grew up in the Air Force. My father was a survivor of Pearl Harbor. And so I spent a lot of time in an environment of those who committed to serving their country.”

REPRESENTATIVE NIKI TSONGAS (D-CT)

“And so, if I’m working on an issue, as we had to work starting in 2008, where the predatory lending was so pronounced and people were losing their homes and all these foreclosures were taking place across the nation, of course I identified with that. I come from a community, growing up, where I saw people who were evicted from places, who lost their homes, and so even though this was a more sophisticated way of doing it, through your banking institutions, of course I identified with that...”

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE WATERS (D-CA)

## INFLUENCE OF RACIAL, ETHNIC, AND SEXUAL IDENTITIES

“So in all of history prior to there being an out gay or lesbian person in the Senate, when they either discussed advancing civil rights for the LGBT community or... how to prevent the advancement, ... all of those discussions have occurred in rooms without voice from the LGBT community participating. And now they’re happening in rooms where I’m present and can represent a perspective.”

SENATOR TAMMY BALDWIN (D-WI)

“And, you know, it goes without saying—well maybe it doesn’t go without saying—but as someone of African descent, the issues that are really relevant to African Americans are things that are really important to me as well.”

DELEGATE STACEY PLASKETT (D-VI)

“Being an Asian American, so either Asian American or a woman of color, those are also interest areas... [where] I feel that I have a responsibility to speak.”

REPRESENTATIVE GRACE MENG (D-NY)

“Because I come from an immigrant family and my parents are Mexican, I certainly... feel a sense of responsibility of being a voice on behalf of the Hispanic community.”

REPRESENTATIVE LINDA SÁNCHEZ (D-CA)

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A number of women see themselves as a “voice for the voiceless,” representing children, the economically disadvantaged, immigrants, people of color, the unborn, and others whose interests have not been adequately represented in Congress.

“In general I feel that it’s really important to be a voice for people who don’t feel anybody is listening to them... [W]hat... started me in politics to begin with is when I had a state legislator tell me I couldn’t make a difference because I was just a mom in tennis shoes. I thought, ‘Who are you to say that to me? Moms in tennis shoes have just as much right to be heard.’ So I’m always super sensitive to people who feel their voices aren’t heard or aren’t important because they are, and I want to speak out for them.”

SENATOR PATTY MURRAY (D-WA)

“Well, I really want to be a voice for the voiceless and for people who have no real... power in Washington—...the people who don’t have fancy lobbyists, people who don’t have huge special interests for their agenda, ... women and children, and children who are ill,... LGBT rights. Those are all things I tend to gravitate toward because they don’t have as many champions.”

SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND (D-NY)

“Everybody who can’t afford to hire a lobbyist... [E]very day when I’m confronted with an issue to decide on, I try to think through in my mind, ‘Okay what would the single mother living in Arnold, Missouri with three kids who makes \$27,000 a year, how will this help her or hurt her?’ So I really try to do that filter every time. There are a whole lot of things that don’t get enough oxygen out here, and almost invariably they are people or issues that don’t have lobbyists.”

SENATOR CLAIRE MCCASKILL (D-MO)

“I have an organizing principle that I’m here because the people that I represent don’t have well-paid lobbyists to represent their interests in particular. But they need... educational opportunity, job opportunities. They need social support in the midst of high unemployment. And so I’m an advocate, often in the face of bipartisan criticism about wanting a welfare state.... And I’m very, very proud to fight for food stamps and social services to meet the needs of people when they are down and out.”

REPRESENTATIVE GWEN MOORE (D-WI)

“So our mission statement... centers around... serving a cause greater than one’s self... It talks about giving voice to the voiceless, and how important that is, and how we have to remember that’s why we’re put here in this legislative role... You can’t solve every challenge through legislation, but there are things we can do.”

REPRESENTATIVE ANN WAGNER (R-MO)



“It was always about expanding opportunity and freedom [while we were in the majority]. ... To recognize the dignity and worth of every person—that was an important role for women to play ...I think that part of the legacy of women in Congress is not only the promotion of women in a large percent of our population here, but how we expand the opportunity for everybody.”

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

“I spent my entire career as a prosecutor because I always wanted to be a voice for those who didn't have one, those people who were marginalized—whether it is a young African American kid who is struggling in school because he's in a poor performing school because of the zip code he was born in, or a single mother who is struggling to keep a roof over her head and is being fleeced by a bank that's charging her a too-high interest rate because she's a vulnerable individual. ...There are so many marginalized people, not just in my district, but across the country. So that is a big focus of mine as well.”

REPRESENTATIVE KATHLEEN RICE (D-NY)

“Children. I really feel that we talk a great game about kids and doing work for children in the United States, but in the end they don't vote, and a lot of our policies just leave them out. So I feel a particular need... [to work on] issues around income inequality and how do we bolster our public schools and early education and healthcare for kids.... It always comes back to kids, and especially kids who are low income, and just making sure that we keep having opportunities for every kid.”

REPRESENTATIVE KATHERINE CLARK (D-MA)

“I came to Congress really to work on healthcare. But I meant that in the broadest context, because I have been representing disabled adults and senior citizens and retirees for most of my working career. And I feel especially responsible to make a difference for those folks who aren't in positions to really make decisions for themselves because we create such terrible barriers to independence.”

REPRESENTATIVE MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM (D-NM)

“And defending the unborn is a tremendous privilege, and it's one that I will not stop, and I will not apologize for.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARTHA ROBY (R-AL)

“I don't know any woman in Congress who is not fighting for children. ...I just think that we go about it very differently.”

DELEGATE STACEY PLASKETT (D-VI)

# Representing Women

Ask the women in the House or Senate if women have made a difference in Congress in recent years, and you will hear strong affirmations of “absolutely” and “without a

doubt.” Nearly all of the women members we interviewed identified some distinct influence of having women in the legislature. They emphasized the ways in which women bring new issues to the congressional agenda and distinctive perspectives to legislative debate. Often, those issues and perspectives are rooted in an understanding of and attention to women’s lives. Representative Jackie Speier explained, “I think we all recognize that we have a responsibility to reflect the interests of women in a heightened manner [more] than maybe our male colleagues do.” The most common perspective that women members of both parties see themselves bringing is that of mother or caregiver, which they often cited as a key influence on how they approach congressional policy-making. Importantly, women members employ gender as a lens that they bring to bear on various issues, not just issues that might commonly be considered women’s issues. But that lens is rarely applied by itself; women in Congress situate their representation of women within their specific and distinct experiences across racial and ethnic backgrounds, ideological and partisan affiliations, and professional and private life histories. While most of the women of color legislators we interviewed do not claim there is a distinctive policy agenda that characterizes their work as women of color, they contend that they bring unique perspectives as women of color to bear across issues in Congress. Similarly, partisanship shapes *how*, not *if*, women influence congressional agendas and debates, including those deemed especially significant to women’s lives. In their comments, women members affirm that their presence is important for representing women’s interests in congressional debate, but also highlight the complexities and multiplicities of identity and experience that ensure that gender often combines with other categories to shape how women members approach their work.

Women members of Congress bring to the congressional agenda new issues related to women’s lives, seek prioritization of them, and are persistent in their work to keep them on the agenda.

“[Women members have made a difference by] raising issues that previously didn’t get the light of day.”

SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND (D-NY)

“There are just issues that would not have reached the top of the agenda without women there pushing to make sure.”

REPRESENTATIVE DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ (D-FL)

“I know several of us thought it was important to support a women’s museum here in Washington.... There are several Republican women who have really stepped up, such as Marsha Blackburn, and I’ve been very supportive of it. We have to tell the men why this is important.”

REPRESENTATIVE CYNTHIA LUMMIS (R-WY)

“Women’s life experiences have made them more attuned to understanding the importance of some issues which maybe didn’t get emphasized as much.”

REPRESENTATIVE ELIZABETH ESTY (D-CT)

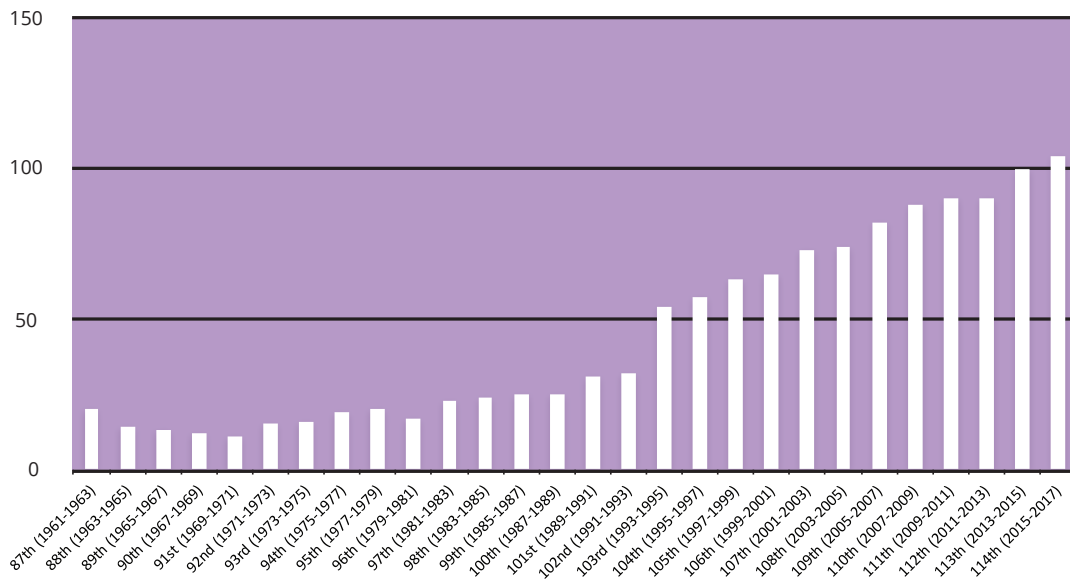
“A lot of the legislative initiatives [that] were passed in previous Congresses—for example, making sure that there are research dollars focused on women’s health has been a priority of female members on both sides of the aisle. I think it’s been helpful to educate our male colleagues about the different perspectives we may bring.”

REPRESENTATIVE ELISE STEFANIK (R-NY)

“I’m saying that Democratic women have carried issues that men just didn’t pay attention to or that were not [even] considered issues.”

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE WATERS (D-CA)

Number of Women in Congress, 1961 – 2017



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Almost all believe women also bring different perspectives than men to their work in Congress because of their life experiences. They bring to bear a gender lens on various issues, not just issues that might commonly be considered women's issues.

"[W]omen bring a different perspective on every single issue. So I'm a believer that all issues are women's issues, and they affect women in some ways differently."

REPRESENTATIVE ELISE STEFANIK (R-NY)

"I will say this, because not to stereotype, but listen, I do think that men and women look at these issues from our own—a different perspective. And that's not to say that men are not sensitive or they don't care. I'm just saying, I do believe that women bring a different perspective to most issues."

REPRESENTATIVE LOIS FRANKEL (D-FL)

"[B]ecause I am a woman I do think that I look... at legislation...and policy through the prism of 'How does this impact women?'"

REPRESENTATIVE LINDA SÁNCHEZ (D-CA)

"I think having women at the table, whether you are in a corporate boardroom or you're in politics or you are... anywhere, is really important because then whatever you do, whatever you accomplish, works for everybody."

SENATOR PATTY MURRAY (D-WA)

"I believe that women look at issues differently than men do, and that's just the way we are. We come at things in a different way, and since 52% of the population is female, it behooves us to make sure that we have a voice, a woman's voice in the discussions."

REPRESENTATIVE DIANE BLACK (R-TN)

"Now there is a woman, at least one, on every Senate committee, and I think that's helping. Again, not because we think alike, but women bring different perspectives, different life experiences, and that's very healthy for an informed debate on issues."

SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS (R-ME)

"Women's life experiences are different from men's. They're not better. They're not worse. But they are different. It is important for us to have people who have those experiences at the table so we can talk about those and we can respond to the challenges that half of the population in this country faces."

SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN (D-NH)

"I think we do have a different voice."

REPRESENTATIVE DEBBIE DINGELL (D-MI)

The multiple identities and experiences that women bring to Congress are equally important to, and are often inseparable from, gender in shaping the ways in which women influence institutional processes, priorities, and outcomes.

## WOMEN OF COLOR

“... because I am female and African American, I know that I have a laser eye on gravitating to women’s issues, issues for minorities, [so] that I can make sure that they are included more.”

REPRESENTATIVE JOYCE BEATTY (D-OH)

“... my priorities are people who live in high poverty areas, minorities, and women. Obviously I represent all of the people of my district, but my particular areas of interest are the poor, minorities, and women.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARCIA FUDGE (D-OH)

“All the men in the [Hispanic] caucus are great, but we [Latinas] are much faster in thinking about ways in which we can utilize the power of the influence of the Hispanic communities in policy making.”

REPRESENTATIVE MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM (D-NM)

“And so I think one of the elements that I brought to the discussion around equal pay for equal work, for example, was to always put that in terms of what those overall numbers mean for black women, for Latinas. Because I think just articulating the difference between saying a general number like 78 cents on the dollar [for women overall compared to white men] and saying 64 cents [for black women] or 49 cents for Latinas helped my district relate to an issue that was thought of as a broader women’s concern, but not really a concern for women of color. And I think that helped our [Democratic] caucus to understand that as well.”

REPRESENTATIVE DONNA EDWARDS (D-MD)

## WOMEN VETERANS

“The opportunity to bring voice to the many women who have served and sacrificed so much for our country comes with great responsibility. Many of my colleagues on the House Armed Services Committee have not served in the military, and some have misguided views about women in the military that don’t reflect the realities of the contributions women have been making for generations. I appreciate the opportunity to not only share my own perspective, but to share the experiences and voices of the many women who have and continue to serve our nation in uniform.”

REPRESENTATIVE TULSI GABBARD (D-HI)

“I remember when I showed up to become a fighter pilot and there was really nobody to look up to, and these three women showed up at a meeting...it was a fraternity of military pilots called the Daedalians. At the time we weren’t even allowed to be Daedalians, but they showed up and sat down and started talking to me...and they were these amazing, feisty, funny, strong women who just encouraged me in my journey, which was so meaningful for me. ...[When] a press story came out over the weekend [noting that the Women Airforce Service Pilots’ rights to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery were revoked], somebody on my staff saw it and forwarded it to me, and I was infuriated. Like, are you kidding me? These women are now being kicked out of Arlington? So we sprang into action right away and said, “You know what? First of all, we’ve got to continue to put pressure on the administration to actually fix it, but then if they’re not going to, we’re going to have a legislative solution.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARTHA MCSALLY (R-AZ)

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The most common perspective that women members of both parties see themselves bringing as women is that of mother or caregiver. Numerous women pointed to their societal roles—as mothers, grandmothers, daughters—and their shared life experiences, often in those roles, as sources of their ability to represent women and bring distinctive perspectives to bear on their congressional work.

“We’re moms. I think that’s a huge thing that we have in common. ...So many women, at least at my age, are dealing with elderly parents and see the challenges. And these are experiences that we have that are different from the male members. I think there is more kind of a sense of greater responsibility for the family that women have.”

SENATOR HEIDI HEITKAMP (D-ND)

“I’m a mom and the majority of voters in the county are women.... I just think we bring a completely different perspective to the conversation. Most of the voters in this country are women. So, they deserve to be represented and have people there that think like they do. A lot of the women that I know are juggling lots of different responsibilities. They are not just working jobs, they are caring for their parents, they are raising children, they are making their household budgetary decisions, they are making the healthcare decisions for their family, they are feeling stressed and stretched in many different directions. And that perspective needs to be at the table when we are talking about bills and legislation.”

REPRESENTATIVE KRISTI NOEM (R-SD)

“We know that women in the household—moms and wives—across this country are the ones who are paying bills and taking care of healthcare for their families, and making sure that it all works. So we knew that we had to have a more personal conversation and really speak to women with the understanding that this affects people on a personal level. And it’s not just about dollars and it’s not just big billions and trillions of dollars. It’s about how it affects every family. So because we became more [aware] of that conversation, I’ve seen a real change in the way that we are all articulating this—women in the Congress and men in the Congress.”

REPRESENTATIVE RENEE ELLMERS (R-NC)

“I think it is really important that people who are basically caregivers, that people who basically run our households, are the people who make decisions about what goes on in those households.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARCIA FUDGE (D-OH)

"I know for me, still having school-aged children at home and trying to balance that and having aging parents who have lots of difficulties—my mom has Alzheimer's [and] my dad had a debilitating stroke. Those issues around research and funding and home health ....I am in that sandwich generation and I relate to it. But I'm a member of Congress, and I have a lot of resources that other people don't have. ...Knowing those pressures and how real they are helps us do better in the way we set policy and the way we think about our economy and the way we provide healthcare and how we plan for the future, how we access education, what we are researching, the importance of federal dollars to that and how it affects our budget, ultimately."

REPRESENTATIVE KATHERINE CLARK (D-MA)

"You know, you just assume that everybody else has the same [familial] arrangement and until somebody stands up and says, 'No, that is not the reality for many in this country. That's not my reality,' they don't ever consider that perspective. It just never even crosses their mind. So I feel like my role as a woman on the committee is very important, because I don't just speak for myself, I speak for many similarly-situated women... [Were I] not there, that perspective is totally absent from the debate."

REPRESENTATIVE LINDA SÁNCHEZ (D-CA)

"Women come to Congress bringing with them their life experience. Some of us are married, some are divorced, some are single, some have children, some don't have children. But in general, although we've had different life experiences, I do think that for me, as a mother of three and a grandmother of eight, I bring my personal experiences to the work I do. And I have greater understanding of what some of these struggling women go through... although I was very fortunate. I didn't run for Congress until I was 50, but I was working for part of the time I was raising children. And I... felt guilty, whether I was home...[or] whether I worked. I [just] felt guilty. So I think women do share important perspectives, whether they work at home, whether they work for nonprofits, whether they were getting paid. The same struggles were shared by most women."

REPRESENTATIVE NITA LOWEY (D-NY)

"... having working mothers, having grandmothers, having people involved in the process who have experienced gender discrimination, wage discrimination—that gives the whole Congress a much broader perspective. And it's very important."

REPRESENTATIVE ANN MCLANE KUSTER (D-NH)

While women members of both parties display passion for and claim credibility on similar issues that most directly affect women, their ideological divides can often lead them to advocate very different policy positions and prescriptions on these issues. This dynamic is especially evident in the area of reproductive rights. Partisanship shapes how, not whether, women influence the agenda, conversation, and institution as women.

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND CREDIBILITY

"[Women] certainly have knowledge about some issues from their personal experience. ...Women by nature...have dealt with pregnancy, so that's why ...it's a natural fit for women to share their perspective on [pro-life issues]."

REPRESENTATIVE VICKI HARTZLER (R-MO)

"Women obviously look at [abortion] differently from men. ... I think for women it's much more personal, because women get pregnant and men don't."

REPRESENTATIVE SUZANNE BONAMICI (D-OR)

"This is a very personal decision, a very personal situation for a woman, and I think that women feel that it is hard for men to put themselves in a position that frankly they can never be in."

REPRESENTATIVE DIANE BLACK (R-TN)

"I'd say this [reproductive rights] is a very personal issue for women, and they have experienced it and they don't want government putting their hands all over their bodies, you know. So they feel very passionate about it."

REPRESENTATIVE CAROLYN MALONEY (D-NY)

"...It's not that women are better than men. We're not; we're equal to men, equally good and equally bad. But we bring with us a life story experience, and you know when the men get out there on the floor and talk about the joys of childbirth, fine, but they never gave birth and we know how joyful it is, but also how difficult it is and what you face when there is a problem with your pregnancy. So just there alone ...we can authenticate the experience that women are having outside."

SENATOR BARBARA BOXER (D-CA)

## PARTISAN DISAGREEMENT

"It's rare now that Republicans and Democrats come together. But it's also a polarization that exists within women. So we can't depend upon women in the Republican conference to support fundamental issues of a woman's right to choose. We can't expect them to work with us on what we consider to be a war on women and negatively impacting access to healthcare...."

REPRESENTATIVE BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D-NJ)

"Every time they [Republicans] bring up legislation to take away a woman's right to choose, I'm out there blocking it."

SENATOR PATTY MURRAY (D-WA)

"My colleagues on the other side of the aisle continue to make this...or try to coin this in terms of women's health. Abortion is a terrible thing, it's very ugly. It not only kills the baby, but it has tremendously harmful... effects on the woman who made that decision."

REPRESENTATIVE MARTHA ROBY (R-AL)



Most women of color argue that they bring unique perspectives to congressional deliberation and policymaking rather than a distinctive policy agenda.

“I don’t know if it is a different agenda; we bring a different cultural view and diversity to the agenda. You know, feeding a child is feeding a child. Improving the economy is improving the economy. But there is so much disparity in our numbers with minorities that it probably gives an appearance of the differences. ...It is very personal to me. Your black person who needs help from the government—they are told that they are on welfare. [For] a white farmer that gets help—it’s called a subsidy. So for me, we don’t go in with an even playing field.”

REPRESENTATIVE JOYCE BEATTY (D-OH)

“I don’t think our agenda or our priorities are any different from any other woman. I think that it’s obviously part of our responsibility to help those who can’t always speak out for themselves. But that’s part of who I am, so just as much as I try to speak out on behalf of Asian Americans, I also speak out on behalf of women and working parents, it’s part of what makes me who I am.”

REPRESENTATIVE GRACE MENG (D-NY)

“We have our agenda, which is very similar to all women, but then on top of that we have the unique perspective that we bring coming from the African American experience.”

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE (D-CA)

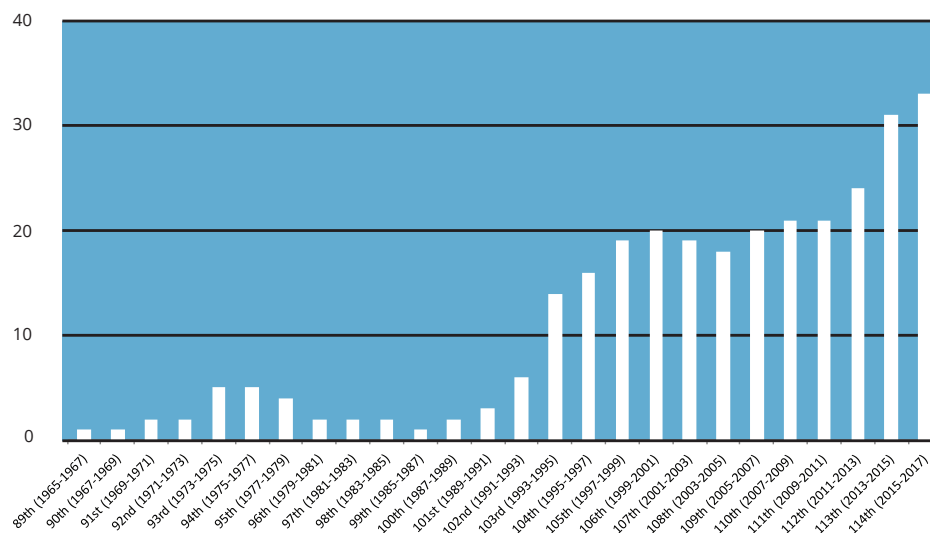
“I would just say that we all have the same agenda, but then we also have an additional focus in terms of making sure that the specific needs of Latinas, in my case, but in other [cases] minorities, are addressed.”

REPRESENTATIVE LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD (D-CA)

“No matter what the issue is, black women find themselves at the bottom of that spectrum. ... So I don’t know [that] we have different issues, it’s just deeper; [as somebody said] when America gets a cold, black people get pneumonia. African American women find themselves dealing with the same issues, but perhaps with greater urgency.”

REPRESENTATIVE GWEN MOORE (D-WI)

Number of Women of Color in Congress, 1965 – 2017



**NOTE:**

The first woman of color to serve in the U.S. Congress was sworn in on January 3, 1965.

# Representing in an Era of Party Polarization

Partisan polarization has become a defining feature of American politics. Voters are increasingly separated by partisan loyalties, and even social networks are implicated in the parti-

san divide. Political scientists have noted that Democrats and Republicans within Congress have grown increasingly distinct with respect to ideology, largely driven by the rise in Republicans' conservatism. In this environment, cross-party collaboration is perceived to bring political risks. Asked how the current environment of party polarization has affected their ability to pursue their goals, women members offer more nuanced, and less universally grim, assessments of their ability to find success within a divided Congress. While some women downplay the extent of gridlock, others note the frustration they feel in trying to break through it. Party differences are evident in women's perceptions of polarization as a hurdle. But those in both the majority and minority parties are cognizant of the politicized environment in which they work. Having a determination to succeed, choosing issues strategically, and advocating for issues beyond the halls of Congress are all strategies women members employ to find success in today's Congress.

Motivated to get things done, the majority of the women we interviewed believe that women in Congress are more likely than men to work in a bipartisan fashion. Women members offer multiple explanations for this proclivity to work across party lines, from gender differences in work style to shared minority status within the institution and different pathways to Congress. Consistent with previous research by the Center for American Women and Politics that finds women's motivation to run for office rooted more in public policy concerns than in personal ambition,<sup>4</sup> our interviews with congresswomen demonstrate how a focus on results facilitates a pragmatic—and thus more bipartisan—approach to legislative work. Personal relationships and networks also create avenues for bipartisan work with men and women, established in expected sites such as committees or travel delegations. Importantly, though, women members also develop relationships in single-sex settings such as women-only dinners and the congresswomen's softball team. Not all women subscribed to the view that women are more bipartisan than men in Congress, but repeated references to and numerous examples of women's bipartisan collaborations within the difficult political context are particularly noteworthy.

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4 Kira Sanbonmatsu, Susan J. Carroll, and Debbie Walsh, *Poised to Run: Women's Pathways to the State Legislatures* (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for American Women and Politics, 2009), p. 9, [www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/re-sources/poisedtorun\\_0.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/re-sources/poisedtorun_0.pdf)

The environment of partisan polarization affects both women and men in Congress and has significantly reduced opportunities for bipartisan cooperation. This difficult context means that women's bipartisan collaborations are even more noteworthy.

"The hyper-partisanship in Congress is detrimental to our democracy, and gets in the way of our ability to get things done and do the job that the American people elected us to do."

REPRESENTATIVE TULSI GABBARD (D-HI)

*Democratic women in the 114th Congress were especially cognizant of the interaction of polarization with their minority party status, particularly in the House.*

"Everything becomes [a] very difficult task to accomplish, and that is sad because there are so many more things we could do to make life better for people."

SENATOR BARBARA BOXER (D-CA)

"The majority really rules in the House. And so if the majority, whatever party it is, is not functioning, then action for the country stops. It's very serious."

REPRESENTATIVE ANNA ESHOO (D-CA)

"For years I've said, talked about parallel universes, but I don't believe it's ever been more true than it is right now. That we see things so entirely differently that [there's a] whole different set of facts and truths over there."

REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL)

*Republican women, as majority party members, were most concerned about gridlock, given the Democrats' ability to block legislation in the Senate and the presence of a Democratic president, Barack Obama.*

"The [House] bills are sitting over in the Senate. I think we've got about 300 bills sitting over there right now."

REPRESENTATIVE MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)

"I would say that most of my battles in terms of foreign policy are against the Obama policies, and not necessarily against the policies of the U.S. House of Representatives or the Democrats."

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

*Some of the women in Congress we interviewed sought to put polarization in perspective, arguing that party loyalties and party differences in ideology can exist alongside collegiality.*

"There is polarization, but it is misunderstood that we get along personally very well. I suspect you've heard that from other people. There isn't animosity between and among individual members."

REPRESENTATIVE VIRGINIA FOXX (R-NC)

"[There are] terrific friendships. People don't carry off the floor what they see on C-SPAN, they do not carry that with them....These are grownup people here."

CONGRESSWOMAN ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-DC)

*Women in Congress share their strategies for maintaining collegiality in their chambers. Overcoming suspicion of bipartisan work on the part of congressional staff and one's constituents is also a challenge.*

“I don't denounce people in person. That's one of the things I don't do. So I don't take to the floor, I don't name names, I don't embarrass or humiliate other members. And some people do that. They do that, that's part of what they see their role as or what plays well in their district. I don't think it's helpful, and I think it gets in the way of us getting things done.”

REPRESENTATIVE ELIZABETH ESTY (D-CT)

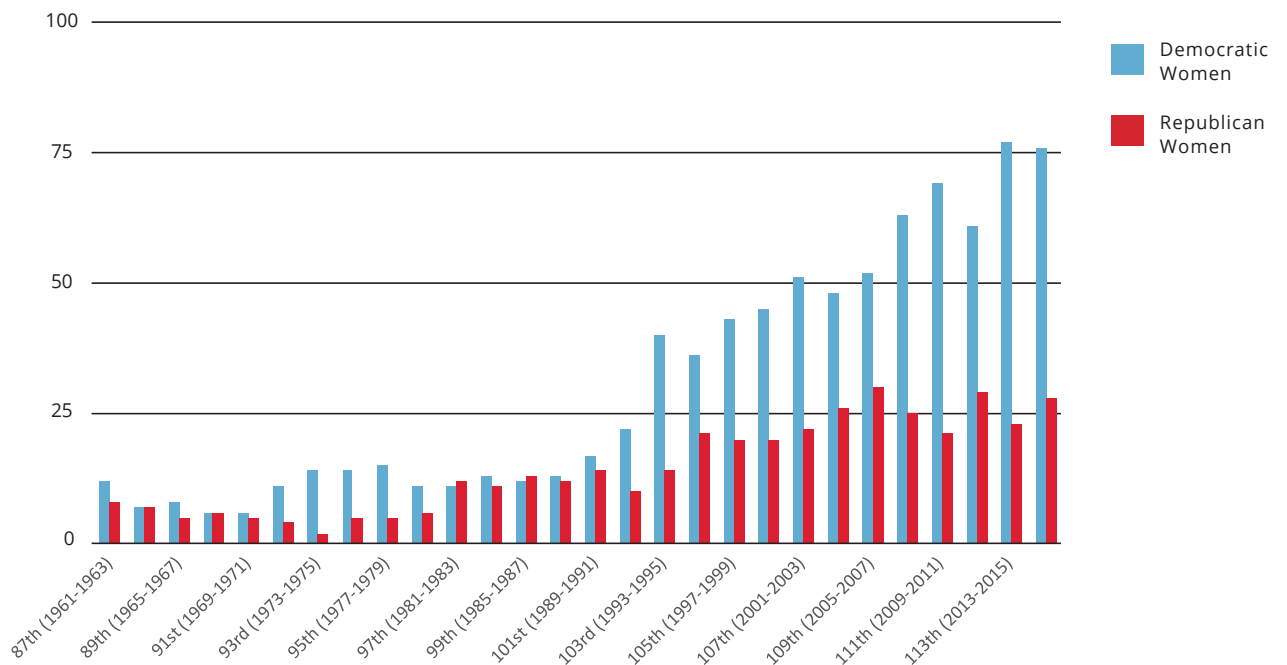
“I think people assume that Republicans are always going to work against Democrats and Democrats are always going to work against Republicans, but sometimes I'm disagreeing with members of my own party. Sometimes I'm building coalitions with Democrats that think more like I do on a certain policy than maybe members of my own conference. So that's something that I feel as though, when I take positions and I'm working on something, that I need to go back home and explain to people as well why this is important and why we need to work together to get it done. And for those people who want to see you constantly battling the other political party, they are not going to be happy with you. But then I go meet with them and I tell them why it's important that we do it. So you can't really be in this job and be effective if you aren't bold enough to have those conversations.”

REPRESENTATIVE KRISTI NOEM (R-SD)

“By finding a Republican, reaching across the aisle and talking to them about the issue, bringing it to their attention,... it still requires a lot of work because, frankly, oftentimes, there are staff who stand in the way and who make presumptions about the member on our side of the aisle that, you know, they don't want to work, or they don't want their boss working with us. I've had to intervene many times with the member, even after the initial conversation, because their staff doesn't return my staff's call. They end up being difficult. They are insisting on language that I know that their boss already agreed to with me—agreed to something different.”

REPRESENTATIVE DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ (D-FL)

**Number of Women in Congress by Party, 1961–2017**



A majority of women in Congress believe that women are more likely than their male colleagues to work across party lines. Women's greater bipartisan proclivity was attributed to factors such as being a woman in a male-dominated institution, a distinctive work style on the part of women, and different pathways to Congress that give rise to differences in legislative style.

"I think the proof is already out there that we do [work across party lines]. Because if you look at the most successful legislators the last couple of years, they are women. It's Dianne Feinstein on cyber security, it's Debbie Stabenow on an [agriculture] bill, it's myself on a transportation bill and a water bill, it's Patty Murray on a budget deal, and I can go on. It is Maria Cantwell on passing legislation for the Export-Import Bank."

SENATOR BARBARA BOXER (D-CA)

"Oh, women are very focused on working together. The GOP women within our own caucus, we work together very well. The Democrats within their caucus, they work together well, and we have a lot of institutions and informal groups where we interact, Democratic women with Republican women. I would say that the women in the House interact in more favorable, more harmonious ways than our male counterparts or opposing [men]...of different parties."

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

"I think it's a trust factor. Women trust, I think there's a better trust factor between the women on this side and the women on that side than there are with most of the men on the other side. At least that's what I've noticed."

REPRESENTATIVE LORETTA SANCHEZ (D-CA)

## BEING A WOMAN IN A MALE-DOMINATED INSTITUTION

"...We're still a minority, and so you better stick together, and I'd say the big thing in a power environment is that our power comes from sticking together—and again, it's not always all 20 of us."

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR (D-MN)

"Women, we're a much smaller group, and so I think we have a tendency to know each other better and obviously in most cases have like interests, and we work well together. So women just approach problem-solving... in a much different way than men do. Particularly at this level of government and public office, and we want to get things done."

REPRESENTATIVE JULIA BROWNLEY (D-CA)

## WOMEN'S DISTINCTIVE WORK STYLE

"I think that women are more collaborative, and we seek the solution. Guys have a tendency to seek a win, and we seek a win-win to get to a solution."

REPRESENTATIVE MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)

"I think it's part of our nature. We are often less concerned with credit, less concerned with partisan politics, less concerned with ideology and more focused on how you get something done and solving a problem. I think a lot of women in the Senate are practical and are quite talented at building consensus. So I think we get more done."

SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND (D-NY)

"When you look at the things that have gotten done, the majority of them had at least one woman leading [them]...I think we are much more focused on solving problems and getting things done and less focused on the trappings of power, our name on a bill, all of the ego trappings with the job."

SENATOR DEBBIE STABENOW (D-MI)

"I, in general, think that women work differently. I think women lead differently, and I think women legislate differently. And that difference is: women lead in a more collaborative way, less individualistic way, even though the nature of elected office, which I think is too bad, is an individualistic kind of nature, you find women to be a lot more cooperative with each other, and in the issues that women pay attention to and focus on."

REPRESENTATIVE KAREN BASS (D-CA)

"You're not always going to agree, but you have to find areas that you do agree. So I do think that women bring a different energy to the process that is able to break down some of the walls."

REPRESENTATIVE GWEN GRAHAM (D-FL)

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PATHWAYS TO CONGRESS

"[Women] want to make a difference, not that men don't, but we are leaving our homes, we are leaving our families and we are coming here and saying, 'I want to fight for x. I'm leaving my whole world because I'm that passionate about it.' Women are driven by passion, and they are very effective."

REPRESENTATIVE JACKIE WALORSKI (R-IN)

"More women go into politics to get something done, to solve a problem, to fix something than men do. Very few of my female colleagues got into politics because they just wanted to be a U.S. Senator. You know, they got in because there was something awry that they wanted to work on and... some of the stories are quite profound....We're not there for the power of politics."

SENATOR TAMMY BALDWIN (D-WI)

## Not all women subscribe to the view that women are more bipartisan than men in Congress.

"I think the ability to work across the aisle is not determined by sex. It may be determined by your background, what kind of offices you had, how you got things done in the past, whether you're bound to everything the party says or you realize that you have to come together."

SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN (D-CA)

"I think there are some members who do better with reaching across the line...it's not gender specific. I think it is more [about] personality, I think it is more [about] the district that you represent. Sometimes it is issue related."

REPRESENTATIVE DIANE BLACK (R-TN)

"I hate to say this, but I don't [think women are more likely to work across party lines]. I think that right now divisions are so hard."

REPRESENTATIVE DINA TITUS (D-NV)

"I don't see any great coming together of issues from women on both sides of the aisle. No, I don't see that."

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE WATERS (D-CA)

"When you say this, you run the risk of sounding like you're a partisan. But the Republican party has gone off the deep end. And it's including the female members of the party."

REPRESENTATIVE ZOE LOFGREN (D-CA)

According to congresswomen, collaboration by women across party lines is often fostered by participation in bipartisan, single-sex activities such as dinners, the congressional women's softball team, the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues (CCWI), and travel. These activities help to build relationships across party lines, which can lead to policy collaboration.

"I think women tend to be more collaborative, but I want to dispel the notion that somehow we think alike or that we share the same political views; just as the men in the Senate span the ideological spectrum, so do the women. But I do believe the style of the women senators is more collaborative. I give a lot of credit to Barbara Mikulski for that and the work that she's done to bring the women together informally in dinners that we hold about once every six weeks. That has allowed us to forge bonds and to work together on some issues. For example, I introduced a bill to congratulate the first two women to pass the Army Ranger course, and virtually all of my female colleagues co-sponsored that resolution."

SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS (R-ME)

"We have a rule at the dinners that whatever happens at the dinners stays at the dinner, that's Senator Mikulski's rule. But it has allowed the women in the Senate to get together and to know each other better in a way that is really helpful, because we learn to trust each other, we learn ...that when we have an issue, we can count on our colleagues to support us."

SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN (D-NH)

"When the men play [softball], the Democrats play the Republicans and walk over to the big stadium, and the Democrats sit in one section and wear blue. And the Republicans sit in one section and wear red. They play their baseball game and then raise money. And we all have fun. And the Democrats wave donkey flags and the Republicans wave elephants. And it raises money for charity. And then a few weeks later, the women play their softball game. Instead of playing each other, the women in the House and the Senate, Democrats and Republicans all form one team and play [against the press]. And it just to me it sort of exemplifies the difference in the more collaborative approach. Let's all form a team, we want to raise money for charities, let's figure out how to do that. Rather than saying, 'Let's play each other,' it's, 'Let's play together.'"

REPRESENTATIVE SUZANNE BONAMICI (D-OR)

"My [Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues] co-chair was Gwendolyn Moore from Wisconsin, and if you were looking for two women who have almost nothing in common, you would probably match us up. You know, I'm a rural person, a rancher from a racially homogeneous state. Very few African Americans, and then Gwendolyn is African American, was a single parent, welfare mother who became...who educated herself and came to Congress from an urban area. Man, ...we were like (laughing) polar opposites, and in our case opposites attracted, because we had a great time together. I think we did good work together."

REPRESENTATIVE CYNTHIA LUMMIS (R-WY)

"I've had a chance to work with several of my colleagues from Armed Services, and together I started a trip to Afghanistan. We'll be taking our ninth trip, I think, this year. And we've had three Democrats, three Republicans, and we wanted to make it an all-women's trip....And that has been very positive. Not only the bonding amongst us, but we worked on bills together."

REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN DAVIS (D-CA)

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Large numbers of congresswomen claim that women are more results-oriented, that they emphasize achievement over ego, and that they are more concerned with achieving policy outcomes than receiving publicity or credit. Many also express the belief that women are more consensual and collaborative than their male colleagues.

“We listen. We have a certain level of humility that we can learn from what people are saying, so you listen....Women don't waste time. Women have to multi-task;...So if you are having a meeting, ...you want to hear what people have to say, you want to build some consensus to take you to the next step. I think that is part of the beauty of women in leadership.”

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

“We want to get things done and we want to do it efficiently and in an organized fashion. We don't just like to talk; we like to listen. And so because we're doers ... we look for others to work with us to make [things] happen.”

REPRESENTATIVE ANN WAGNER (R-MO)

“I think the important thing is that [women] become problem-solvers, rather than problem-makers. And we have problem-makers among Senators who are men. We have none among women.”

SENATOR BARBARA BOXER (D-CA)

“You know, we're kind of the leaders of the Get-'er-Done Caucus.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)

“We are problem solvers. We collaborate, bring people together around a common solution, and do our best to deliver results.”

REPRESENTATIVE TULSI GABBARD (D-HI)

“I don't think women come here to be somebody. I think we come here to get things done.”

REPRESENTATIVE ANNA ESHOO (D-CA)

“I think that if you can generalize, and all generalizations are usually faulty, but if you can generalize, I think women are not as conflict-oriented, and they try to reach a consensus and they don't relish the fight and the drama of opposing, clashing ideas. We're more consensus driven. Of course, that is a generalization, and like any stereotype, we can have ten exceptions, but I would say by and large we work together because we see that there is benefit in doing that.”

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

“I think that women tend to ... be a lot more focused on what the job is, getting the job done, and doing it in a way that is not necessarily adversarial, and I think that that makes things a little better.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARCIA FUDGE (D-OH)



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Having a determination to succeed, choosing issues strategically, and advocating for issues beyond the halls of Congress are ways that help women navigate a challenging setting and pursue their agendas.

“You know, just trying to figure out and assess and have your situational awareness. So figure out the environment that you are in...and actually figure out how to get things done in that environment. And then also, don't just accept the environment as it is, be a part of changing the environment, right?... There are a number of things that we can find enough bipartisan agreement on to fix a problem that's impacting people, that we can get across the finish line. So that's generally been my focus.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARTHA MCSALLY (R-AZ)

“The other side of it is that the fact that Republicans have been so dysfunctional... [has] created tremendous opportunities for people like me. Because when they can't get something like the Export-Import Bank, for example, out of the committee because of their chairman's ideological views, ... then they have to sneak, tip-toe behind and come up with a strategy, and they look for people, they know that I'm there. I'm floating around looking for a chance to help get it over the finish line because it's important work. I'm looking forward to that on some of these other social issues.”

REPRESENTATIVE GWEN MOORE (D-WI)

“We are here right now, and so we've got to find issues...so we were very strategic about looking at the opiate issue and focusing on neonatal abstinence syndrome, which affects these babies being born dependent on opiates, because we knew that that could cut across lines. We didn't know that we would get Mitch McConnell to be our lead co-sponsor in the Senate, which is kind of insane, but we are strategic in finding Republican co-sponsors and really working issues for them and really putting a package together with this bill.”

REPRESENTATIVE KATHERINE CLARK (D-MA)

“I would say I don't like some of the logjams here, but I try to find ways to embed ideas, legislation, projects, to the extent I can, in legislation that is moving—amendments on bills that are moving. So I try to be strategic about where we spend our time.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARCY KAPTUR (D-OH)

“You know, we keep running the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Interior, or the VA, and in a tricky environment like this, I think the way that... we continue to feel productive and useful to our constituents is by making sure we keep a lot of our focus on those things where the progress isn't going to stop.”

REPRESENTATIVE CHELLIE PINGREE (D-VT)

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Women are quite active in working on bipartisan legislation with both women and men from the opposing party.

"I was beat in 2010 by Congressman Paul Gosar, and after that 2012 election, when we were both elected to Congress, we got together and said, 'Let's put our history behind us and work together to get specific things done for Arizona.' That's really grown into a nice friendship. You know, we don't agree on everything, but we stick to the common ground of making things better for Arizonans. Our staffs get along really well together. So it just shows you can get ... things done. I cosponsor his legislation, he cosponsors my legislation."

REPRESENTATIVE ANN KIRKPATRICK (D-AZ)

"I would say that I'm one of the most liberal members of the Senate. And there was... an issue that I am working with Joni Ernst on, and she is a very conservative member of the Senate. But there was an issue that I thought her voters would care about, and it has to do with access to medical care. And so we worked with her staff to have her consider being my co-sponsor on a bill that would create a telemedicine for Medicare. And it took a while for her to agree to that, but the outcome of that was... she came up with the same idea...a similar idea, telemedicine for veterans. She asked me to be the Democratic co-sponsor of her legislation. I know that would never have happened if we hadn't done the previous reaching out and that effort to make that connection. So those kinds of outcomes keep me going."

SENATOR MAZIE HIRONO (D-HI)

"I'm working with Congressman Jimmy Duncan from Tennessee. We've worked together for years. He and I worked together a long time ago and got some changes in getting credit card companies off of freshman college students. At the time, more students were leaving college because of debt than academics. And we are now working on political intelligence. It's part of the STOCK Act, you know, not trading on information only available to Congress members and their staffs."

REPRESENTATIVE LOUISE SLAUGHTER (D-NY)

"I've worked with Senator Shelby of Alabama on justice [and] commerce issues, particularly the American space program. I went to Huntsville, Alabama, we went to see everything about the dawn of the rocket age to the space camp that he was so proud of. So you start on: 'How do we keep America's space program going, astronaut driven programs? I'm a space science lady, based on Goddard [Space Flight Center, in Maryland], we both were for the kids coming into science and technology, and that's how taking the time and to be willing first of all to listen, to have an open—to express an open mind, to tell us who you are, to get to know you. And what I think came out of that [was] mutual respect, mutual understanding, and then try to find mutual common ground."

SENATOR BARBARA MIKULSKI (D-MD)

"I worked, for example, with Martin Heinrich, who is now in the Senate, on a federal lands exchange bill called FLTFA [Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act], and boy, he was the prime sponsor and I was his co-sponsor when the Democrats were in control, and then it switched when the Republicans were in control, and that bill finally passed the House last Friday, and he and I had been trying...that was our eighth year trying, so now it's in his lap. So I can't wait to call him and say, 'Hey Martin, hot potato in your lap, good luck.'"

REPRESENTATIVE CYNTHIA LUMMIS (R-WY)

“The number one bill that I’ve been working on is the 21st Century Cures Bill, which I’ve been working on for about two years. It is a bipartisan bill which I’m working on with Fred Upton, who is a Republican from Michigan, the chairman of my committee, the Energy and Commerce Committee, and we started working together on this bill to really take a deep dive on restructuring the National Institutes of Health and the FDA to be able to modernize the way we do clinical trials and biomedical research, and then how do we expedite approval of those new drugs and devices at the FDA? And sort of the genesis of that bill was with the mapping of the genome and the development of technology. We realized the way that we were doing research was kind of antiquated and slow, and in the meantime Alzheimer’s is an epidemic and Type 2 diabetes and Parkinson’s, all these diseases for which we don’t have treatments or cures. So we’ve been working on that bill and we developed the legislation, we—it’s about a 350-page bill, plus an innovation fund of \$8.75 billion in mandatory spending for the NIH. It’s one of the key bills of this session, and we passed it through the House in July, 344-77, and so now it’s under consideration in the Senate.”

REPRESENTATIVE DIANA DEGETTE (D-CO)

“For the Women’s Museum, I think I got practically every Republican woman on it, so that he [Speaker John Boehner] wasn’t responding to me. He was responding to his Republican leadership, his Republican members who wanted it. So I worked hard to get Republican men and women on the Women’s Museum.”

REPRESENTATIVE CAROLYN MALONEY (D-NY)

“Carolyn Maloney and I did the National Women’s History Museum, and we had worked together on a couple of issues, and then she had shared with me her desire to get the National Women’s History Museum bill passed, and she came to me and she said, ‘Can you help me with this?’ And I said, ‘Sure, let’s see what we can do.’ So I went to work with it and there were some that said, ‘Oh you need to put your name on the bill,’ and I said, ‘No. Carolyn has worked on this for 13 years. I think she deserves the credit. But I am going to help her to get this done.’ So she worked with me to rewrite portions of the bill, we cleaned up the bill, and we were able to get it passed.”

REPRESENTATIVE MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)

“I represent a city that for 20 years had been trying to get some land conveyed to them by the Air Force. It was an old storage facility for jet fuel, and the fuel had leaked into the soil, so they’ve been remediating it for quite some time, and it was getting to a point where the soil was good enough quality that you could repurpose the land, and they really wanted to increase open space because it’s a very built-out urban city. So I worked with...my sister served on the 114<sup>th</sup> with me, she served on Armed Services, and she had a good working relationship with the chairman, who was Republican, and when I reached out to her to ask her, ‘How do I accomplish this?’ she put me in contact with his office, and their staff worked with my staff to get that conveyance included in the overall bill, which passed.”

REPRESENTATIVE LINDA SÁNCHEZ (D-CA)

*Some Democratic women suggest that there are fewer opportunities to collaborate with Republican women than men because of the low numbers of Republican women. They may also be constrained because they constitute a small proportion of their conference.*

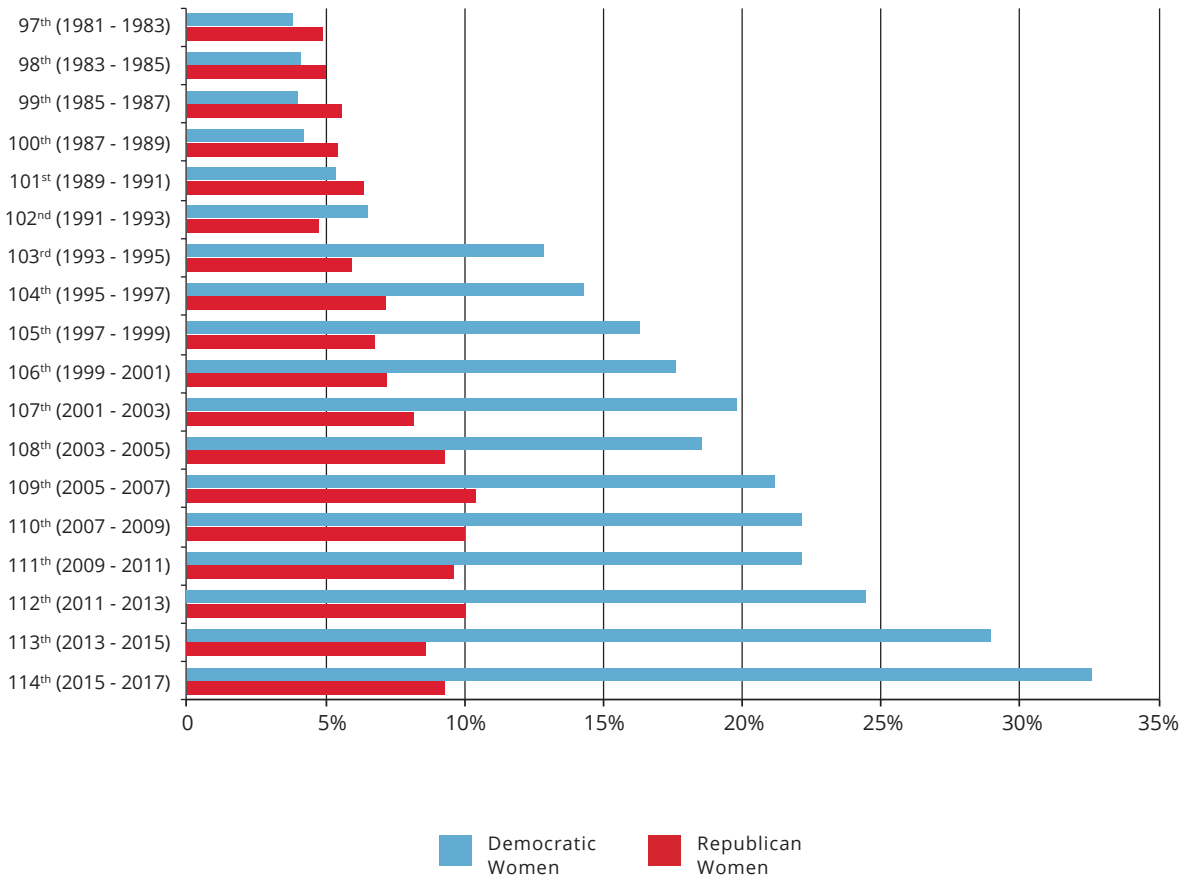
“Most of the issues I work with the other side on are issues where there are not a lot of women; they don’t have many women. The committee chairs ... I work with are men. So I can’t say that there is a woman that kind of stands out as a person. They also don’t have a lot of power. I don’t know how many chairs they have, one, two. So you wouldn’t go to them unless they could strike a deal, assuming they do so.”

DELEGATE ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-DC)

“I think that the ones that are over there more often than not have to walk an even finer line of conservatism than the men do. And so there is less likelihood for us to find agreement on issues.”

DELEGATE STACEY PLASKETT (D-VI)

Congresswomen as a Percentage of Republicans & Democrats, 1981–2017



# Racial and Ethnic Diversity among Women

Women's experiences, approaches to representation, and legislative influence

are far from monolithic. In addition to partisan differences, racial and ethnic diversity among women is key to understanding the myriad ways in which women's congressional representation matters. Women of color were just over six percent of all members of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, and 31.7 percent of women legislators. They held a record 33 seats, but fell significantly short of a level of representation proportionate to their presence in the U.S. population. Women of color take pride in their constituencies and see themselves as powerful and effective actors within Congress. They argue that they bring important perspectives into the legislative process, often educating their colleagues in the process. While they provide key examples of how they bring underrepresented issues into the policy process, they also emphasize the breadth of issues on which they work. The perspectives that they bring are distinct from those of white women and men of color. Some also note the existence of gender, regional, and ethnic differences operating within racial categories, in addition to the racial and ethnic differences operating among women.

Women of color, who hold a record number of seats in Congress, take pride in their constituencies and see themselves as powerful and effective actors within Congress.

"Well, my greatest priority is representing my district, and my district is very diverse. I'm so proud of that because we have a large population of Caucasians, Latinos, Asians, and we have a significant African American population."

REPRESENTATIVE JUDY CHU (D-CA)

"We have a lot of women and minority women running the show for Democrats, and I think that's really incredible because they come with a unique background and unique experience and perspective."

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE (D-CA)

"Women play a pretty strong role in the [Congressional Black] Caucus. And in my observation, women seem to have had an agenda, sort of a platform and goals that they want to achieve as they take on leadership. That's not nearly as common with men."

REPRESENTATIVE EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON (D-TX)

"We're not only the conscience of the Congress, we're also the brilliance and the intelligence of the Congress, because we want people to know that we are more than black people standing there fighting for a cause. We are scholars. ... Probably out of our Caucus, 75% of them are attorneys and nurses and [have] advanced degrees and have held some of the most prestigious jobs in the country. So we just don't come with hard luck stories; we come with a lot of skills and a lot of credentials to do our job."

REPRESENTATIVE JOYCE BEATTY (D-OH)

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Women of color in Congress argued that they bring important perspectives into the legislative process. Their presence can also educate colleagues about their communities.

“Seeing people of different backgrounds and ethnicities and interacting with them, I think that you find some commonalities, but you also maybe begin to appreciate the diversity in our country. And when you appreciate that, it makes for a much more expansive thinking, in my view.”

SENATOR MAZIE HIRONO (D-HI)

“I think with Latina women, we focus on those things from our own personal experience. Plus the whole issue of immigrant women and children is something... that we focus on and help our colleagues to gain a better understanding of where they are coming from and why they are coming here.”

REPRESENTATIVE LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD (D-CA)

“I would say mine was the only voice in [the Judiciary] Committee that spoke for the importance of family unity [in debates over immigration reform]. And so I brought [that voice], ...not only as a woman but also as an immigrant. And this is why it is important to have minority representation on all of these committees. Because you have different life experiences, different perspectives, and women certainly bring that to any committee they are on.”

SENATOR MAZIE HIRONO (D-HI)

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Women of color serving in Congress seek to bring minority voices into the policy process. But they also emphasized the breadth of the issues that they work on.

“Immigration reform is very, very important to [the Congressional Asia Pacific American Caucus]. This is not highlighted often in our national media, but we are 40% of the 4.3 million visa backlog. That has to be fixed. And so we emphasize greatly the family visa program and how it has to be fixed. And then there is the racial profiling issue pertaining to South Asians and Muslims. Actually, four out of the five countries with the biggest Muslim populations are from Asia.”

REPRESENTATIVE JUDY CHU (D-CA)

“[The Congressional Hispanic Caucus is] much broader than just immigration reform, not that it's something we should let go of, but there is a whole lot of other issues, including financial long-term security by minority households, which is something we ... need to do something about, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security and entitlements, increase the financial security and the independence of minority families... and do something about poverty in a way that's really meaningful.”

REPRESENTATIVE MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM (D-NM)

“Of course, we always pay attention to issues that concern African Americans, but that happens all over the place,... folks who oftentimes pay attention to what is happening with their ethnic group, or with their race. But in addition to that, we take on everything...from some of the issues that I guess I just spoke about, to being the ranking member for the Financial Services Committee dealing with Wall Street and the financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Is that what a black woman can do? Yes, yes, yes it is. So we do everything.”

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE WATERS (D-CA)

Women of color offer perspectives reflecting the intersection of race and gender that are distinct from those of white women and men of color. Some note specifically the existence of gender, regional, and ethnic differences operating within racial categories.

“My first struggle is being of African descent, not being a woman. And that I definitely think that our issues are very different than... white women’s issues. Just like I think that Latino women or women of Middle Eastern descent’s issues are different than white women’s issues, because our experiences in America have been enormously different than they have. And I think that not only colors our own experiences, but we have to be representative of those groups when we come here to Congress.”

DELEGATE STACEY PLASKETT (D-VI)

“I think [women of color are] bringing up issues that maybe men wouldn’t have brought up. But I think women are much more sensitive to it. Some racial disparity issues, particularly in communities where the first impact..., in many cases, would—particularly in health, be in women and children, right?”

REPRESENTATIVE DORIS MATSUI (D-CA)

“The things that we encounter as an African American woman is different from what an African American male will encounter, and so ...when I talk about education of girls, I know what it feels like, the barriers that girls have, and also African Americans. So there are times, you know, the double-minority... allows you to address multiple issues.”

REPRESENTATIVE BRENDA LAWRENCE (D-MI)

“Look—the Hispanic community is not made up of [only] left-wing politicians. There are conservative people as well. And blacks are not just liberal, they are conservative as well. So diversity is so important because no group is monolithic.”

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

*Latina women in Congress stress the importance of recognizing regional and ethnic differences among the Latino community, as well as the importance of representing Latinas and Latinos.*

“Everybody...every part of the country is a little bit different, and so when things are being developed, whether it’s material that should be in Spanish, there are certain ways that things should be worded so that they actually are meaningful and reach the target audience. And for Latinos I’ll tell you it’s very difficult, because the way you approach the Mexican community is different than the Puerto Rican community, than the El Salvadorian community. So that’s always a challenge for us as a Hispanic Caucus.”

REPRESENTATIVE LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD (D-CA)

"It's a little bit different, because you know there are issues that disproportionately impact Latina women. So like our immigration policy and separating families, most white women don't have to worry about that, but Latina women do. Most African American women don't have to worry about that, but Latina women do if they have a family of mixed status. So there are certain issues that ... are unique to Latina women that—it is not to say that every white or black woman doesn't experience that, I'm sure Caribbean immigrant families experience that, but it just disproportionately impacts Latinas. I hate when we say a certain issue is a woman's issue because every issue is a woman's issue, but certain policies disproportionately impact women, and I do feel like there are policies or areas, issues, that disproportionately impact Latina women in particular."

REPRESENTATIVE LINDA SÁNCHEZ (D-CA)

*In the context of the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, Black women in Congress often spoke about the issue of gun violence as one important to their communities.*

"You know, maybe I'm biased, I don't see it as an agenda because African American women deal with so much of the country's prejudice, racism, sexism, I wouldn't call it an agenda, but I would say that they are extremely focused on making sure that when we see educational barriers, when we see the Voting Rights Act, when we see... criminal justice, those are things that immediately affect our community and our families. And so it's not an agenda, but you will see African Americans rise up. Like I'm fighting gun violence. You know, I have lost a second-cousin to gun violence, but I see it every day and it's African Americans. And so it's not an agenda, but...I think the passion to directly legislate and bring these issues up so they are in the forefront, I think that is what you will see from African American women."

REPRESENTATIVE BRENDA LAWRENCE (D-MI)

"One of my issues, big issues is gun safety. ...It's just been hard to get anything though. We've done ... little amendments and those kinds of things, but ...it's just been hard to get anything through. ...When I came [to Congress], every[thing] around the gun violence issue was Newtown, which was devastating [and] horrible, but I had to remind the Democrats ...that as horrible as Newtown was, we have people dying every day and no one talks about [it]. ... We needed to change our vocabulary—it's not just about the mass shootings, it's about the individuals. So that was one thing I raise[d] in the Democratic Caucus, and the other thing was a moment of silence. I stopped standing up about a year ago, and I was the only one that did not stand up. I was just sick of it. [I said] I'm not going to do it anymore, because we stand up, sit down, and do nothing. ...When I've spoken at different places, I said I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but I'm not standing up. I'm not going to be a part of this charade."

REPRESENTATIVE ROBIN KELLY (D-IL)



# Women in Leadership

The roles and influence of women in Congress are conditioned in part by their positional power. Electing women to Congress does not automatically translate into having women in positions of leadership. Party disparities persist in women's

presence in formal leadership positions, with Democratic women holding more positions of power within their caucuses and on committees. In the House, Democratic women credit Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi with creating opportunities for women in the caucus and elevating women to positions of leadership. They also speak with pride about her accomplishments and the significance of her achievements as the first female Speaker of the House. House Democratic women are advantaged in terms of seniority and share of the party caucus compared to their Republican women colleagues, but some women of color note the challenges that remain in earning top leadership positions, including fundraising. Although Republican women remain underrepresented in formal leadership posts, they highlight the significant role they play within the Republican conference, contradicting Democratic women's lamentation of Republican women's limited power. In the Senate, women stress the vital roles women play in both parties and across committees, recognizing the power won just by entering Congress' upper chamber.

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House Democratic women speak with pride about Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's accomplishments and the significance of her achievements as the first female speaker of the House. They credit her with creating opportunities for women in the caucus and elevating women to positions of leadership.

"[Pelosi] has an uncanny ability to really read where the members are coming from. She is the best vote counter of all time, and it's just not because she does the mechanical vote counting, it's because she can read where the members are coming from. So I do believe that women members have a greater ability to develop the relationships and also to read the body language and intent of other members."

REPRESENTATIVE JUDY CHU (D-CA)

"Nancy Pelosi is ... the poster woman for supreme leadership. She not only devised her path to this job by meticulously building relationships and raising money and doing all the things that you do to get to a leadership post, but she has effectively managed the caucus in ways that cause her to still be the leader. She's not the speaker, but she's the leader. And I think, of course we're seeing more and more of that. We now have women in ranking positions who will probably be chairs if we take back [the House] on the Democratic side."

REPRESENTATIVE MAXINE WATERS (D-CA)

"We've had a speaker, Speaker Pelosi, and had it not been for Speaker Pelosi, the Affordable Care Act would not have gone through Congress and so, you know, 17 million people now are covered with health insurance as a result of a woman."

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE (D-CA)

"I think leaders are essentially people who are not afraid to take a risk, because if you are afraid of losing, you can't win. ...I think that Nancy doesn't want to lose, but she's willing to fight to make sure there is a win."

REPRESENTATIVE ROSA DELAURO (D-CT)

"[Pelosi] is completely focused on a mission, missions I should say, because she's absolutely tireless. And building support for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Recruiting candidates. Supporting candidates. And then running this caucus. ...I watched her closely during the Affordable Care Act. Believe me, as much as I am friends with the President of the United States, we would not have had that legislation if it hadn't been for Nancy. I think the White House, some people in the White House anyway, wanted to go small, let's take it in chunks, and Nancy put her foot down and said, 'I will get you the votes and we need to do the whole thing.' And just delivered. Just relentless. She has the whip list in her head. She knows where everyone is, what their issues are, how they have voted in the past. She will make phone calls from morning till night....I think she is just an incredible role model."

REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL)

"I think her success as a great vote counter, as [a person with] an ability to bring divergent groups to the table, has a lot to do with her X X chromosome. I think those are qualities that women tend to have in greater abundance than men."

REPRESENTATIVE JACKIE SPEIER (D-CA)

"Certainly being here to help elect Nancy Pelosi, the first female speaker of the House, for me, was eye-opening and her leadership, I think, was emblematic of the desires of many women to demonstrate their leadership ability and authority. I mean, she shepherded through some of the most difficult legislation that our nation has seen, particularly with the implosion of the economy and having to do really quick measures to be able to undergird and provide a safety net, if you will, so that we'd have a soft landing of the economy. She really was a champion there. And then of course with the Affordable Care Act, she carried that like Atlas, you know, carrying the world on her shoulders, and was able to rally all the Democratic conference for the most part to stand firm, stand tall, and make it happen. So her leadership was demonstrative of what I think most women see in themselves in terms of leadership ability, but are never given the opportunity, particularly in male dominated professions..."

REPRESENTATIVE YVETTE CLARKE (D-NY)

"Leader Pelosi makes a very intentional effort to make sure that women are always included whatever the discussion is, so that's something that she prides herself on and she shows through her actions and... making sure that at any given major conversation or discussion, that it's not just men around the table. So she's really very good about that."

REPRESENTATIVE GRACE MENG (D-NY)

"I do want to give the women the opportunity to show their stuff, to show their stuff, to just get out there and show their stuff. That they have the four things we say about leadership, they have a vision, they have knowledge and therefore their judgment is respected, they have a plan, they think strategically, and they are able to convey that passion because this is all intellectual."

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

"I had a level of trust among all of the members, including especially the women, because they knew I shared their challenges and I've been there, I've done that, and understand what they might be facing and try to smooth the path for them."

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

Although only two Republican women served as standing committee chairs in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress, Republican women note the significant role they play within the Republican conference.<sup>5</sup>

“Half of our [Republican conference] leadership is women. And that is a higher percentage than on the Democratic side. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Virginia Foxx, Lynn Jenkins, Ann Wagner, Mimi Walters.”

REPRESENTATIVE ELISE STEFANIK (R-NY)

“We have a good working relationship with the GOP leadership, they take us seriously and they want us to have a very important role going forward.”

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

“The women, at least on the Republican side, have been given lots of opportunities to lead in our conference in different committee assignments. We don’t have enough, and I think this is in part a numbers issue that often has to do with seniority; we don’t have enough women who are chairing committees in the House. Right now we only have Candice Miller, who chairs House Administration, and we’d certainly like to see that number increase, but I know there are certainly women who are chairing subcommittees, and even as a freshman I was given a chair of a subcommittee.”

REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN BROOKS (R-IN)

*At the same time, some Democratic women lament the underrepresentation of Republican women and express interest in seeing more Republican women in office and available to take leadership roles within their party.*

“Well, in highly partisan times, one might reflect that there are only six Republican women and there are 14 Democratic women. It was 16 [Democrats]-4 [Republicans] last session. And so there are fewer leadership opportunities on the Republican side. That’s sort of just a fact.... There’s less seniority [among Republican women senators] overall and fewer of them.”

SENATOR TAMMY BALDWIN (D-WI)

“I just think that for the Republican side, they just have so few numbers that they are not able – and, you know, they have a much more competitive means for gaining chairmanship—that you don’t see women in many leadership positions in that side of the aisle.”

DELEGATE STACEY PLASKETT (D-VI)

*Some women of color note the challenge of raising money, which is an important factor in reaching leadership positions in Congress.*

“The amount of money that any of the members of color raise is substantially lower, and that then becomes a barrier to moving in other places in leadership.”

REPRESENTATIVE DONNA EDWARDS (D-MD)

“I think black women can get votes, but to be able to be in leadership and do everything, you have to raise money. Women inherently have a harder time raising money.”

REPRESENTATIVE BRENDA LAWRENCE (D-MI)

5 In the U.S. Senate, only Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) chaired a standing committee (Energy and Natural Resources) in the 114th Congress. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) chaired the Special Committee on Aging. Representative Candice Miller (R-MI) was the only Republican woman to chair a House standing committee (Administration). For a complete listing of women in congressional leadership positions in the 114th Congress, see [www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/conglead-hist.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/resources/conglead-hist.pdf).

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## Women in the Senate also note the vital roles women play in both parties and across committees.

“Women as leaders of committees, in my judgment, help the legislation move more quickly because of their more collaborative style. If you look in the last Congress at some of the bills that did get through, a lot of them had leadership from women senators that made a difference in my view. In the last Congress, Patty Murray and I led the Housing and Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee; we always produced the bill, always. Even though we didn’t agree on every issue, we would work together to achieve consensus on a bill.”

SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS (R-ME)

“The reason the seniority system is good is there can be no prejudice, you reach a certain status and you go, and now the women are getting that status and so they are ascending to lots of committees, lots of committees, and to Harry Reid’s credit he has put a huge number of women on his leadership team—about equal, or maybe even more than men, and it is terrific. So ...Democratic women have a lot of power. Office chairs and members of leadership.”

SENATOR BARBARA BOXER (D-CA)

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## House Democratic women comprise a larger share of their caucus and are advantaged in terms of seniority compared with their Republican women colleagues.

“We are in positions of authority. And at one time when I looked at the Armed Services Committee, I think this is still true. I think of the seven subcommittees, three or four were led by women on the Democratic side. So it’s not just that we’re here in numbers, but we’re hanging in there and we’re achieving some seniority through our longevity. And then that puts us in positions of authority. And that is not as true on the other side of the aisle.”

REPRESENTATIVE NIKI TSONGAS (D-MA)

“I think you have seen more women in leadership positions on committees, and on non-traditional committees. It’s not just family. It might be taxes. It’s not just...children. It might be veterans. So women are now filling some of those leadership positions, so I think this very important role. That puts them more in front of the press and puts them more in the backroom and puts them more in an agenda setting role.”

REPRESENTATIVE DINA TITUS (D-NV)

# Challenges and Opportunities to Being Women in Congress

All members of Congress confront the hurdles of partisan polarization, but

women members confront additional challenges in navigating spaces and norms that were established

by and for men. Asked explicitly about unique challenges or opportunities that congresswomen face, as well as about the existence of commonalities among women, women members of the House and Senate identify the most explicit and significant gendered problems to be those that affect their entry into Congress. Once elected, women still must work harder to prove they belong, and they struggle to be heard on all issues and in all congressional spaces. They still are too often evaluated on style over substance and face greater challenges than men in meeting the conflicting demands of work and family. Some women of color express specific concerns about being heard and respected in party settings, but also note their effectiveness in claiming and exercising their power in spite of hurdles placed in their way. The greatest problem women cite is their numerical underrepresentation in both chambers of Congress. But it is this underrepresentation that also presents women with opportunities for inclusion in settings and during debates where their parties are cognizant of the need for gender diversity, as well as to inspire and encourage more women to run for office.

Many women express the belief that the challenges of campaigning and getting to office are greater for women than are the challenges women face once elected. Gender differences in supportive campaign infrastructure and the standards by which candidates are evaluated were among the top challenges women identified.

“Being here in Congress is not as hard as it was to get here.”

REPRESENTATIVE BRENDA LAWRENCE (D-MI)

“We know the struggle of actually trying to put together a winning campaign - to put together a financial infrastructure and a political infrastructure that is not already premade for us like it is for men.”

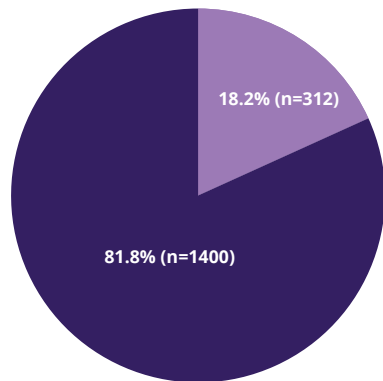
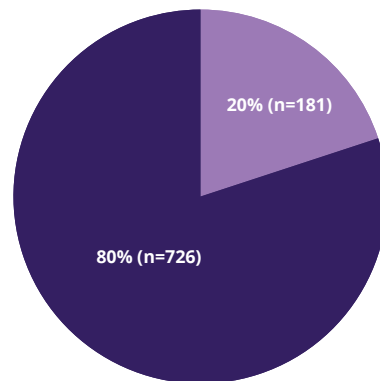
REPRESENTATIVE KATHLEEN RICE (D-NY)

“I think women are more reluctant to have their lives examined up and down, and in and out. ... Women are more inclined to say, ‘Who needs it?!’”

REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL)

“If you can come through that and you have proven yourself to people that believe in you, [if you have proven] that you are the best person to fight for them, I think that’s the key.”

REPRESENTATIVE JACKIE WALORSKI (R-IN)

Major Party Candidates  
Filed for US Congress, 2016Major Party Nominees  
for US Congress, 2016

Women  
Men

Nevertheless, within Congress, many women note that they must work harder to prove they belong, and they struggle to be heard on all issues and in all congressional spaces. They still are too often evaluated on style over substance and face greater challenges than men in meeting the conflicting demands of work and family.

#### WORKING HARDER TO PROVE THEY BELONG

"My experience has been, and sadly I think this is still true today, that when a woman is elected to the Senate, she still has to prove that she belongs there, whereas when a man is elected to the Senate, it's assumed that he belongs here. I will say once you pass that first test...then you're a member of the club. But I think there still is a barrier that men don't face, and I think that's true of Democratic women as well as Republican women."

SENATOR SUSAN COLLINS (R-ME)

"It's people sort of thinking you can't govern or be in charge, even though you can."

SENATOR AMY KLOBUCHAR (D-MN)

"People are not used to seeing women in these positions. So we have to work twice as hard to prove ourselves."

REPRESENTATIVE KATHLEEN RICE (D-NY)

"Now, when it does come to inside of our party and inside conservative ranks there, I think it should be noted that conservative men do not— that some conservative men do not view women as full and equal partners in the workplace. And I know for some men, that is never going to change. So I don't look at it and say it is a stumbling block. I recognize it and I do my part to change their attitude every day by doing a very good job of what is put in front of me to do."

REPRESENTATIVE MARSHA BLACKBURN (R-TN)

"Women still have to prove their competency. ...You need to know more than your male colleagues and even some of your female colleagues. ...Women have to work harder. That is still very much the case here. And no matter how many times that you demonstrate that you [are competent, you have] to continue to demonstrate it."

REPRESENTATIVE ROSA DELAURO (D-CT)

"I think that constantly women have to keep proving themselves, and I don't know when that will end."

REPRESENTATIVE LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD (D-CA)

## COMBATTING EVALUATIONS ON STYLE OVER SUBSTANCE

"[Congressmen] put the suit on....and get in front of a microphone and debate an issue. When we do it, it's, 'Wow, what's that all about? She's got nice shoes on.'"

REPRESENTATIVE RENEE ELLMERS (R-NC)

"They still are more judgmental about women's appearance than male appearance, [and these comments] are still...in abundant supply."

SENATOR TAMMY BALDWIN (D-WI)

"I don't think it's different in the Senate than anywhere else in the world. I think we all play on a certain landscape that you have to recognize. Women are often judged on their appearance. They are often judged on non-substantive issues, and you have to just be able to navigate. I think that's no different than any workplace in America."

SENATOR KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND (D-NY)

## JUGGLING DEMANDS OF WORK AND FAMILY

"I'm going to tell you there's not a whole lot of time up here to be social, which I think is one of the reasons why it makes it more difficult for members to form those relationships across the aisle, because most of us ...travel back and forth from our districts. We're interested in getting here, getting our job done, and then getting back home to our husband and our children."

REPRESENTATIVE MARTHA ROBY (R-AL)

"Sometimes I bring my kids to events because it's an event that I have to go to, but if I happen not to have seen my kids often enough in the past few days, then I bring them. So I've had comments. People will say to me, 'Oh we didn't vote for you to be a babysitter.' Where I don't sense the same thing that is said to men. They think it's very noble for a father to bring his own child out. Whereas for us, it's like, 'What are you doing? You're distracted.' ...Yeah, there definitely is a bias out there."

REPRESENTATIVE GRACE MENG (D-NY)

"We're still the caretakers, and because we're a sandwich generation - because we're taking care of our children, taking care of our parents— ...there's a harder tug and pull."

REPRESENTATIVE KAY GRANGER (R-TX)

"I have many more female colleagues worried about caring for their spouses who are ill, their parents who are aging. I rarely had that conversation with my male colleagues."

REPRESENTATIVE ANN MCLANE KUSTER (D-NH)

"Like right now, I'm feeling guilty because my son has an essay for a high school application I'm trying to get him to write. And I'm here and he's down there, and, you know, how do you do that? And now you feel like you are a bad mother because you are not doing that work, and so those are the things that I think that female members struggle with more than others. And I don't think there is necessarily kind of honesty among the women that those are really issues they grapple with. I think that the fear is that if you discuss it too openly, people will say, 'Well, what the hell are you doing here, then?'—that if you have these problems, that means...you shouldn't do the job."

DELEGATE STACEY PLASKETT (D-VI)

## FIGHTING TO BE HEARD ON ALL ISSUES AND IN ALL CONGRESSIONAL SPACES

"I'm always trying to figure out how I can present in a way that will be heard more effectively. I certainly had those experiences where I feel like I say something and then someone else maybe says something very similar. I almost feel what I said wasn't heard, right? But someone else around the table will be recognized for having said it, and that puzzles me. And so I'm always trying to figure out how to present in a way that will be heard."

REPRESENTATIVE CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS (R-WA)

"I think in a lot of topics [women] are somewhat discounted. I mean, I'm sure there are many times when I raise my hand to speak on the agriculture committee and take a particular point of view. People are kind of like, 'What does she know about it?' Maybe they wouldn't feel that way exactly if I was a male."

REPRESENTATIVE CHELLIE PINGREE (D-ME)

"I think the biggest challenge for a woman is not to be kind of painted into a corner of, okay, so you're a woman, so you can care about these issues that are women's issues."

REPRESENTATIVE KATHLEEN RICE (D-NY)

"I'm saddened that when I got here I was the only Republican woman on the foreign affairs committee, and now 26 years later I'm still the only Republican woman on the foreign affairs committee."

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

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Some women of color express specific concerns about being heard and respected within their party, but also note their effectiveness in claiming and exercising their power.

"[You have to understand that] this has always been the good ol' boy's system, that men usually ruled in this area, and sometimes you kind of have to speak out. I'm here, I have a voice. [You have] to know when, where, and how to interject yourself to be able to be heard and understood and taken into consideration."

REPRESENTATIVE GRACE NAPOLITANO (D-CA)

"I tend to think the challenges...and maybe it's just my own vantage point...I think it's more about race than it is about gender on the Democratic side."

REPRESENTATIVE KAREN BASS (D-CA)

"Sometimes some of the guys try to take on women of color when they wouldn't take on their own peers. I've seen that happen a few times. It was wrong, and we beat it back. Within [the party], but we beat it back."

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE (D-CA)

"I think women of color will call it like it is, really fast, if they are being messed over in the process. ...You know it when you're being jerked around on something...and you're not going to tolerate it. That's just our history."

REPRESENTATIVE BARBARA LEE (D-CA)



## Women across chamber, party, and race and ethnicity see their lack of greater numbers as a major challenge.

“Representative democracy is supposed to be responsive to and reflective of the needs of the entire populace. And so if you are getting this tiny slice, you’re not going to be able to be as responsive and as attuned to different approaches.”

REPRESENTATIVE ELIZABETH ESTY (D-CT)

“Well, hell, we’re an institution that runs by numbers. You have to have votes, and there’s just not enough of us here.”

REPRESENTATIVE ROSA DELAURO (D-CT)

“I do think that there is strength in numbers, and I do think that [as the numbers grow] the women will become an even stronger factor in how the House runs, what the House leadership looks like, and really just how the House functions.”

REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN BROOKS (R-IN)

“If you have a table like this and there’s one woman and seven other men, the conversation is not going to move forward in a way that you can feel like you can bring up an idea. And you just bring one woman into the equation and all of a sudden, ...you can look at that woman and you know you’re thinking the same thing. And it sort of gives you some sense of, ‘She understands, right.’ I mean we can be different parties. She understands, right.”

REPRESENTATIVE DORIS MATSUI (D-CA)

“A third of our caucus are women, and we want more.”

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

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Women from both parties note that there are times when their underrepresentation affords them opportunities in settings and during debates where their parties are cognizant of the need for gender diversity and inclusion.

“I actually have found there to be more opportunities than challenges, and I do believe that is because the leadership in both parties recognizes that we need more women in Congress.”

REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN BROOKS (R-IN)

“If anything, the party is looking for opportunities to make sure women get opportunities, because it’s very sensitive on women’s issues and women’s leadership issues.”

DELEGATE ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-DC)

“I think [Republican men] sometimes have to be reminded that it’s important when women are by and large the spokespeople for the pro-choice point of view, that it’s important to have women also be speaking on behalf of the pro-life point of view. Otherwise it looks like they’re gender insensitive, and I don’t really believe they are.”

REPRESENTATIVE CYNTHIA LUMMIS (R-WY)

“There is that desire, I believe, to have diversity—whether it is domestically or when you’re traveling abroad. They want us to be going to countries where women are prime ministers and saying, ‘We have the same level of diversity here back in America. We’re not back in the Stone Ages.’”

REPRESENTATIVE KATHLEEN RICE (R-NY)

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But women in Congress also see their ability to inspire and encourage more women to run for office as perhaps their major opportunity. This sentiment transcends party, racial/ethnic, and chamber lines. Women in Congress view themselves as role models for women and girls, and they are actively engaged in encouraging other women to become politically involved. They hope to see more women join their ranks.

“I would be surprised if every other one of my [women] colleagues didn’t say that they felt an enormous responsibility as a role model for young women.”

REPRESENTATIVE KATHLEEN RICE (D-NY)

“We have...an opportunity to try to be role models for women and men in our states and in the country and [to] try and change the mindset about women and girls’ thinking about running for office.”

REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN BROOKS (R-IN)

“Diversity matters because you want people of the United States to look at this legislative body and say, ‘Oh, they represent me.’”

REPRESENTATIVE ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN (R-FL)

“... you have to be aware that you’re a role model for women, and that’s something that I’ve taken to heart. And I’m constantly meeting with young women who reach out to our office, whether they’re from the district or they get in contact from across the country, to encourage them to step up to the plate and add their voices to the conversation.”

REPRESENTATIVE ELISE STEFANIK (R-NY)

“Certainly for the young women out there... or actually women of all ages, ... when women look to Congress, it’s important that they see their voices being heard and know that the issues they care about are being discussed at Congress.”

REPRESENTATIVE SUZANNE BONAMICI (D-OR)

“First of all, it’s not that women are better than men, I say this to the women, it’s not that we’re claiming anything better, we’re just saying the beauty is in the mix, and it is very important that at that table you have decisions being made with half the population present at the table, more than that. Secondly, it is really important for women in the country to see that someone who may have shared their experience—whether it is to be a working mom or whatever it happens to be—to have a voice at the table.

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

“So I am a female of color, how does that make a difference? It makes a difference when little African American girls can dream that they, too, can serve in Congress.... I never thought as a little girl that I would be sitting in the United States Congress. You know I was just hoping I would graduate from high school and get a job and be a good citizen, because I’m first-generation college. And so now to be able to sit there and vote on the most important issues that are before us and that run this country, and to go back home and sit in the classroom or to sit in the neighborhood center and be able to honestly say, ‘Somebody in this room—lots of you—can do this and yet do greater things.’ Then when they turn on the TV and they see a Robin Kelly from the same district and state as the President of the United States, or they see a person from New York who sits on Energy and Commerce that is under 50 years of age and is an African American female, [or] when they see somebody from the Virgin Islands that grew up from the islands and came here and went to an Ivy League law school, and private boarding schools, they go, ‘Wow. I too can be that.’”

REPRESENTATIVE JOYCE BEATTY (D-OH)

“I think all women have in mind how we help other women going forward.”

REPRESENTATIVE SUZAN DELBENE (D-WA)

“I have felt I need to make it a great priority to encourage other women that I believe should consider running for Congress to do so.”

REPRESENTATIVE CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS (R-WA)

“For those of us who have been fortunate enough to achieve some level of success in our own careers, we better darn well help other women because we’ve got a long, long way to go. ... I think it’s part of my life’s mission to help women succeed and be in positions to help make a difference in our state, our country, and our world.”

REPRESENTATIVE CHERI BUSTOS (D-IL)

# Conclusion

Women members of Congress want to see more women in office because they know first-hand that their presence matters. Representative Alma Adams (D-NC) told us:

*I just want to reiterate that women need to be here, and they need to be here because everything impacts us and our families and our communities. And if we're not here, then the issues that need to be talked about the most won't be talked about. They won't be addressed. You know, they'll never get to the table. So we need to be...in the room, at the table, feet planted firmly under the table, so that we in fact have the kind of voice that we need to have...*

Our interviews with women in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress show that when women are in the room, they bring new, important, and underrepresented perspectives to policy agendas and debates. As Representative Kristi Noem (R-SD) explained: “We know that...about 54% of the population out there that’s voting are women and their perspective needs to be heard.” Women in Congress also bring distinctive work styles and representational motivations, both of which facilitate bipartisanship in a polarized political environment.

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“We know that...about 54% of the population out there that’s voting are women and their perspective needs to be heard.”

REPRESENTATIVE KRISTI NOEM (R-ND)

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By some measures, the deck appears stacked against women in Congress; they navigate an institution that remains both male-dominated and frequently divided. Amidst current partisan division, the majority of women are in the minority, and Republican women are a much smaller proportion of their party’s legislators than Democratic women. But the women in Congress make important contributions despite those odds. They confront and overcome challenges, take advantage of opportunities, and make a convincing case for increasing women’s political representation.

In identifying challenges they face in getting into office, the women in Congress provide an important reminder that more work is necessary to clear the hurdles confronting women candidates. This report has implications for those seeking to inspire more women to serve and to break down barriers standing in the way of increasing women’s representation. Our findings make a strong case for electing more women—in all their diversity—to legislative office. First, in a political context where those in and out of government seek to break through gridlock, we must elect people who seek to get things done. According to our research, women’s motivation in running for and serving in elected office is rooted in seeing results. As Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) observed, “[I] believe that women are maybe less motivated by what might be next on the career ladder versus actually wanting to make a difference, wanting to make an impact for the long term. And really about digging in and doing the tough work of getting something done.”

Second, women bring perspectives, priorities, and agendas that would be missing if women were not there to represent women and give voice to those who are too often left out of policy-making spaces. Not only women's differences from men, but also the diversity that exists among women—in experience, voice, perspective, and position—points to the need for having more women in Congress. The value of racial, ethnic and partisan diversity is illustrated in congresswomen's comments and behaviors, reaffirming that representativeness among women requires attention and efforts to promote diversity among women candidates and officeholders. Finally, women in Congress are undeterred by the challenges they confront—whether the challenges be gender-based or not—in doing their jobs. In our interview with her, House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said, “ I do know this. This is not for the faint of heart, and you really have to be ready to make the fight. It's worth it. It's necessary for our country. But it is hard.” There was no shortage of resilience expressed among the congresswomen we interviewed, and there was determination to succeed on behalf of those for whom they give voice in the House and Senate every day. They do not deny that it is hard, but they very much believe that it is worth it.

They are not alone. Our interviews with women in Congress provide ample evidence that women's legislative representation is well worth the work that organizations and individuals do to promote women's political participation at all levels. That work should and will continue, bolstered by the conviction of women in Congress that the presence of women matters.

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“This is not for the faint of heart, and you really  
have to be ready to make the fight. It's worth it.  
It's necessary for our country. But it is hard.”

HOUSE MINORITY LEADER NANCY PELOSI (D-CA)

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## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

A total of 108 women (20 senators, 84 representatives, and 4 delegates) served in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. With financial support from Political Parity (the Hunt Alternatives Fund), we interviewed 83, or 77%, of these congresswomen between September 2015 and April 2017 for the CAWP Study of Women in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. Our response rate was 81% among women members of the U.S. House, and among women senators our response rate was 65%, with more success among Democratic than Republican women. We had a strong response rate across the two parties (84% for Democrats and 59% for Republicans, including delegates). We also had a strong response rate for women of color (80% of Black women participated compared with 67% for Latinas and 57% for Asian American women, including delegates). Almost all of the interviews were conducted between September 2015 and August 2016.

The interviews ranged between 12 and 77 minutes in length, with the average interview lasting 29 minutes. Virtually all of the semi-structured interviews were conducted in person on Capitol Hill although a few were conducted by phone to accommodate member schedules. All interviews were on the record although members could choose to go off the record at any point during the interview. Questions focused on representational goals, policy priorities and achievements, party polarization, and perceptions of gender and race dynamics within the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress. The information that we gathered from over 40 hours of member interviews is unmatched by any recent study of congressional representation—women’s or men’s—and is part of a larger project focusing on women’s representation in Congress in an era of partisan polarization.

All interviews were conducted by one of a team of five interviewers, including the four principal investigators on this project (three Rutgers professors and CAWP’s Director) and one senior graduate research assistant. The interview protocol included priority questions that were almost always successfully asked of each woman legislator; supplementary questions that were asked when time allowed; and member-specific questions about policy in the 114<sup>th</sup> Congress.

## APPENDIX B: LIST OF CONGRESSWOMEN INTERVIEWED

Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC)  
Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)  
Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA)  
Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-OH)  
Rep. Diane Black (R-TN)  
Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)  
Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)  
Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)  
Rep. Susan Brooks (R-IN)  
Rep. Julia Brownley (D-CA)  
Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-IL)  
Rep. Lois Capps (D-CA)  
Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA)  
Rep. Katherine Clark (D-MA)  
Rep. Yvette Clarke (D-NY)  
Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME)  
Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA)  
Rep. Diana DeGette (D-CO)  
Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)  
Rep. Suzan DelBene (D-WA)  
Rep. Debbie Dingell (D-MI)  
Rep. Donna Edwards (D-MD)  
Rep. Renee Ellmers (R-NC)  
Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-CA)  
Rep. Elizabeth Esty (D-CT)  
Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)  
Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC)  
Rep. Lois Frankel (D-FL)  
Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-OH)  
Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI)  
Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)  
Rep. Gwen Graham (D-FL)  
Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX)  
Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-MO)  
Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (R-ND)  
Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI)  
Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)  
Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH)  
Rep. Robin Kelly (D-IL)  
Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-AZ)  
Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN)  
Rep. Ann McLane Kuster (D-NH)  
Rep. Brenda Lawrence (D-MI)  
Rep. Barbara Lee (D-CA)  
Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)  
Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY)  
Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM)  
Rep. Cynthia Lummis (R-WY)  
Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY)  
Rep. Doris Matsui (D-CA)  
Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-MO)  
Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA)  
Rep. Martha McSally (R-AZ)  
Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY)  
Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD)  
Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI)  
Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA)  
Rep. Grace Napolitano (D-CA)  
Rep. Kristi Noem (R-SD)  
Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)  
Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)  
Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME)  
Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI)  
Rep. Kathleen Rice (D-NY)  
Rep. Martha Roby (R-AL)  
Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)  
Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA)  
Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-CA)  
Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA)  
Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)  
Rep. Terri Sewell (D-AL)  
Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)  
Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY)  
Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA)  
Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)  
Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY)  
Rep. Dina Titus (D-NV)  
Rep. Niki Tsongas (D-MA)  
Rep. Ann Wagner (R-MO)  
Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-IN)  
Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)  
Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA)  
Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ)

