



HOST:

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NEW WOMEN IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPECIAL EDITION

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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, the new women in the House.

REPRESENTATIVE TAMMY DUCKWORTH (D-IL): (From tape.) It's given me a new mission and I get to do this for them.

REPRESENTATIVE TULSI GABBARD (D-HI): (From tape.) I needed to be in a position to have some kind of effect.

REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN BROOKS (R-IN): (From tape.) I certainly want to help, you know, other Republican women think about running for office.

REPRESENTATIVE CHERI BUSTOS (D-IL): (From tape.) I see government as a tool to be able to help people.

REPRESENTATIVE MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM (D-NM): (From tape.) Now, I have an opportunity to join them, to carry the torch for future generations and women and their families.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I'm Bonnie Erbe on Capitol Hill for this special edition of *To the Contrary*. There are a record number of women serving in the 113th Congress, 20 in the Senate, 78 in the House.

Although we're still not close to parity, the fact is that 25 percent of the women serving in the House were elected this past November. This week, we introduce you to some of them.

REP. DUCKWORTH: I ran in 2006 because of my concerns about how our service members returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan were being treated.

MS. ERBE: She didn't win in 2006. Later, she started working for the Department of Veterans Affairs under President Obama. But Duckworth decided to run again in 2012.

REP. DUCKWORTH: When the way it happened in 2010 and we had a lot of Tea Party congressmen who were elected, including the one that represented me, who seemingly refused to do their jobs as congressmen and were very much ideologically driven, as opposed to driven by the need to serve the constituents, that's when I decided that, you know, I started thinking about running again.

MS. ERBE: Her concern for veterans stems from her own military service. In 2003, she was serving in Iraq.

REP. DUCKWORTH: I had been in Iraq, at this point, eight months. I had been away from home 11 and I was just doing a regular day's mission, flying a Black Hawk helicopter. I was the copilot on the crew and we had flown a full day of missions and had a really good day. The weather was getting better. It wasn't so hot anymore. I was flying with a crew that I really got along with and two aircraft. And at the end of the day – this was during the second battle for Fallujah and we were not in the battle, but we were in nearby area. And what had happened was some of the insurgents who've been flushed out of Fallujah had been hoed up in an area and we were ambushed in flight. And they shot at us with a number of things, small arms. And we were hit with small arms fire and a rocket propelled grenade, which is what exploded on me. And we were able to land the aircraft. The last thing I remember was trying to shut down the engines on an emergency engine shutdown.

MS. ERBE: She woke up a double amputee, using both legs. How did it change her life?

REP. DUCKWORTH: It's freeing. It's been a gift. And I choose to look at it as a gift. Yes, my life is infinitely more difficult physically. I can't do the things that are great passions in my life. I can't – you know, my unit is deployed right now and there's a piece of my heart with them. And I can't be there. I'm sorry. It's given me a new mission and I get to do this for them.

MS. ERBE: She wants to help the military with her new national platform.

REP. DUCKWORTH: There're so many things that need to be done. I think there's a responsibility to – if we are going to go to war – have a discussion of how we will use these men and women, right? They're the ones who bleed. So we don't make decisions to go to war recklessly. We have honest discussions of the cost of war.

If we're going to expand our greatest national treasure, it'd better be for the right reasons. And then, they'd better be well-equipped. And then when they come home, whether or not they have visible wounds, we need to take care of them and we need to take care of their families.

MS. ERBE: Duckworth wants to make sure military decisions are made with the best information and the most discussion possible.

REP. DUCKWORTH: I think that hopefully I can be a voice to say, well, I'm not weak on defense. And I won't go tomorrow. I'm still serving in the National Guard. I don't know what they can do with a gimpy lieutenant colonel, but maybe I can wash windshields or something. I can still do that. (Laughs.) But if we're going to do this – and I will be the first to volunteer to go. But we're going to have a discussion. We're going to have a good brawl discussion where we don't demonize or vilify one another because someone is questioning the motivations and the benefits of this nation, right? We're going to invade another country if it's truly in the greatest interest of the United

States, then absolutely, let's have that discussion and we're going – if we're going to do it, then we're going to do it.

MS. ERBE: Duckworth's motivation to run for office was her commitment to veterans and their families, but she wants to serve everyone in her district as well.

REP. DUCKWORTH: These are my neighbors. This was my life. This was my life before I was deployed to Iraq. I understand this district because this is me. This is – you know, these families live the experience that I lived. Their kids go to public schools like I went to public schools. Many of them rely on government assistance. You know, I was on Food Stamps as a teenager because my dad has lost his job when he was 55 and no one would hire him because he was just simply too old and they didn't want to take a chance on a 55-year-old. Well, a lot of the people in my district are having the same problem. And so I see this district as just – it's my life. It's their life. We have the same experiences.

MS. ERBE: And she hopes Congress will continue to look more like the people it represents.

REP. DUCKWORTH: The true strength of America is the diversity of her people and what we bring to the table. And I think that government and leadership, whether it is in government or in corporations or not for profits, need to reflect the American people. And I don't think the United States government right now reflects the American people.

We don't have the same number of women in leadership roles in Congress as we do have women in this nation and same thing with persons of color. I am the first Asian-American elected to an office other than alderman of a city in the state of Illinois. That's shameful that it took this long. I'm certainly not going to be the last.

MS. ERBE: Tulsi Gabbard is the opposite of the old guard in national politics. The first Hindu in Congress and first American Samoan is also one of the first female combat veterans sworn in to serve in the House of Representatives.

MS. GABBARD: I had enlisted in the Hawaii Army National Guard in 2003, after – the year after I was elected. And really it was because I wanted to do more to serve my state and to serve our country. The job that I was trained to do in medical logistics and operations, it was already filled by someone else, so I was not on that mandatory deployment roster, but knew very quickly that there was no way that I could stay home in the comfort of my house and my job and beautiful Hawaii, watch my 3,000 brothers and sisters in uniform deploy overseas. So I withdrew from my reelection campaign and got trained in a different job and volunteered to go and served on that 18-month long deployment.

MS. ERBE: Tulsi Gabbard, the youngest woman to be elected to a state legislature, left her job there to serve her country. It was an experience that changed her forever.

MS. GABBARD: I don't believe that anyone can go through an experience like that and not come back a different person. I completely broadened my perspective, changed my perspective on the world, and felt very strongly that I needed to be in a position to have some kind of effect on this ever shrinking global community on foreign policy, on veterans, serving our military families and our service members.

MS. ERBE: Gabbard joined Illinois Tammy Duckworth as the first two female combat veterans sworn into office. Gabbard takes that responsibility seriously.

MS. GABBARD: It's kind of amazing that it's taken this long because we've had women who've raised their hands and volunteered to serve on the frontlines dating all the way back to the Civil War. And the fact that we have over 1.8 million women veterans across the country, women who are leaving their families, leaving their jobs, leaving school behind to go and serve our country every single day is a story that hasn't been told enough. Women face unique challenges in military service, but also bring unique contributions that also need to be talked about.

So that that's one thing that I look forward to being able to do is to be able to be a voice for this huge constituency of selfless heroes that hasn't really had a firsthand voice or a strong voice here in Congress.

MS. ERBE: And for Gabbard being in Congress is about serving people, not about partisan bickering.

MS. GABBARD: When you look at a lot of the frustration that people have with Congress from the outside looking in, you look at the frustration that members have here, it all stems from the fact that people feel that they have been forgotten, real people, real families who are struggling, who understand that this place here is the people's house and the people who are elected to serve here are elected to serve them. And when people get caught up in the blame game and saying who's right and who's wrong and criticizing each other and pointing out all of the negatives, I believe that they lose sight of why – why they're actually here.

MS. ERBE: Gabbard hopes to stay focused on her goal, using her spirituality as a cornerstone.

MS. GABBARD: It really does come from the practice of Karma Yoga, from my Hindu practice and Karma Yoga really being the essence of dedicating everything that you do to benefit others, to have a positive impact on other people, and dovetailing whatever line of work you're in in that service leadership concept.

MS. ERBE: Gabbard wants to make sure other members of the 113th Congress remember why they are in D.C.

MS. GABBARD: It's really trying our best to be an embodiment of this servant leadership concept and that when one person starts, other people start to catch on and other people also are similarly inspired to remember maybe why they came here in the first place, what motivated them to come here in the first place. And in Hawaii, this is what we call "aloha," bringing aloha here and aloha is seen in a lot of ways sometimes as, you know, you've got the flower leis and the hula girls and – but really the essence of aloha is having respect for each other, regardless of our differences, regardless of things you may disagree on, and listening.

REP. BROOKS: I've never run for office before. First time I've run for office before and so first time I'm office holder.

MS. ERBE: However, Brooks is no stranger to public life.

REP. BROOKS: I was the United States attorney during the Bush administration. Before that, I had been a deputy mayor in the city of Indianapolis in the late '90s, under Mayor Goldsmith. Right before running for office, I was a senior vice president and general counsel for our state community college system called Ivy Tech Community College. It's been more my time at Ivy Tech and working with the unemployed and the underemployed and really the issues facing the country now, which are jobs and the economy, the reason I jumped into the race.

MS. ERBE: Born and raised in Indiana, Brooks is married and the mother of two adult children. She plans to spend her time in Washington creating jobs in her home state.

REP. BROOKS: We have a couple of counties in my district that still have over 10 percent unemployment rate. We need to make sure that we're creating an environment where companies want to grow their jobs, where the private sector wants to grow jobs and bring more people into the workforce. There are a lot of issues right now as to why they're not growing jobs, why they're not creating jobs and those are sort of the things I want to focus on, like tax reform, which I think we're going to be very focused on in the 113th Congress.

MS. ERBE: Of the three new Republican women in the House, two of them are from Indiana.

REP. BROOKS: My counterpart to the northern part of the state, Jackie Walorski and I are the first women to represent Indiana since 1958, Republican women that is. There have been some Democrat women, but we're the first Republican women, so there is a big push, not only in our state, but I think across the country to try and recruit more women to run for office.

MS. ERBE: Brooks wants to see more women in Congress, but she says it may not be for everyone.

REP. BROOKS: We hope to be role models and mentors to others and encourage people to think about running, be very practical about what it takes. It does take a toll on families and it can take a toll on finances for families and so those are things that, you know, I think we as women need to share with each other, but yet we need to encourage them to run because we are very much underrepresented in Congress, I think in both parties. And so, you know, I want to keep a focus on that and I certainly want to help, you know, other Republican women thinking about running for office.

MS. ERBE: Brooks also wants to reach across the aisle to get to know all the women serving with her.

REP. BROOKS: I think the message of the voters that sent to the new members of the 113th Congress is they want people to work on these great problems the country's facing. They want to do it in a bipartisan way. They don't want us to leave our principles at the door, but they want us to find common ground. They want us to try to figure out how to work together. That was a message that I carried throughout the primary and into the general and it won the day. And I found that with members of the other party.

MS. ERBE: Representative Brooks says her children were instrumental in her campaign.

REP. BROOKS: It was very exciting to have a lot of 18-year-olds seniors in high school involved in the campaign and then a lot of young college kids involved. And so we've got to keep them involved because the problems that the country's facing are theirs to inherit. And so we – you know, I'm going to work very hard to encourage and keep a lot of young people involved.

MS. ERBE: Brooks wants those young people to know she understands the challenges they face. She's seen firsthand through her children, their friends, and her work just how tough the job market is today.

REP. BROOKS: If we don't turn this economy around and get jobs growing again, you know, we're going to have a generation of young people coming out of school that aren't going to be put on that career path that they worked so hard for in getting their education, many of them taking out loans and working hard, and so they're bumping up against people with real experience and adults that are also looking for jobs and trying to take care of their families. And so that's why I think we are not where this country needs to be in creating jobs.

REP. BUSTOS: I have pretty much of a zigzaggy career that led to this point. But I was a journalist, always in print journalism, for 17 years. I pretty much had every beat that you can have. Started out on the cop beat, covered city hall, I was investigative reporter, covered health, oversight education coverage, business coverage, all of that. At one point, ran half the news room as an editor.

MS. ERBE: Bustos left journalism and entered communications, working for a health care company. Then, she jumped into local politics and served on the city council in East Moline, Illinois. That led her to run for Congress.

REP. BUSTOS: It's maybe a lofty goal, but you know – and I hope it's not idealistic, I hope we can make this happen, but is really just making sure that we represent the district in a very honorable and honest fashion, make sure that we look at government as a way to help. I don't see government, I don't see Congress as the enemy. I see government as a tool to be able to help people. And that's a driver for me.

MS. ERBE: She has balanced her job and family for many years, but it wasn't until her sons were grown that she chose to make the leap to federal office.

REP. BUSTOS: My kids now are grown. My youngest son is 22 years old. I have three sons. I now have two grandkids. And if – when my kids were young, I don't think I would have been on a position to have been able to run for Congress.

MS. ERBE: Bustos says she could only be successful in her career because she and her husband had been a team.

REP. BUSTOS: I'm lucky in that I have a spouse who does all of our cooking. (Laughs.) It's not my talent and it happens to be his. We very much share the workload at home when it comes to, you know, all the stuff you have to do to make your home functional. And you know, if you don't have a supportive family, I don't know how anybody could do, you know, not just run for Congress, but to be successful in whatever their careers are. You've got to have that support.

MS. ERBE: Bustos wants to bring that level of cooperation to Washington.

REP. BUSTOS: I think the American people are crying out for having not just their own representative in Congress, but for Congress as a whole to work together. We heard about it everywhere. So what I talked about is how do you make that happen and how as a new member can you play a part in helping Congress work together. So what we said is that before I'm sworn in, I will reach out to every new member of Congress, whether they'd be Democrat or whether they'd be Republican.

MS. ERBE: With that bipartisanship also comes some friendly ribbing.

REP. BUSTOS: I've met several of the Republican spouses and I jokingly said to a woman – she – her husband represents upstate New York. And we had – the wife and I had a very nice conversation. And I jokingly said, I said, geez, you seem more like a Democratic spouse. You know, you're a lot of fun. And her husband heard me saying this and he said, yes, she is like a Democratic – she spends like a Democrat. (Laughs.) I said, OK, we're going to do stereotypes here, but you know, the point is we're people.

MS. ERBE: Bustos hopes being part of the most diverse caucus in U.S. history will allow her to do just that.

REP. BUSTOS: You saw the number of women there. You saw the number of Latinos and African-Americans and Asians. It's great. It's such a great reflection of America and a great reflection of, you know, the district that we represent – that I represent now. And I loved it. I think it's – if we can reflect America – and keep in mind, if we truly do that – that's going to be 51 percent of the members of Congress will be women at some point, if we're truly going to reflect America.

REP. GRISHAM: I got deep roots in New Mexico. My family has been there for 400 years. We know that at least 12 generations. We're doing research. We've identified 13 and probably by the time I'm done, we'll be able to show that my family goes back 16 generations in New Mexico.

MS. ERBE: With her election, Lujan Grisham continues her family's political legacy.

REP. GRISHAM: My grandfather was the first Hispanic chief justice in the state. My cousin actually was a Republican member of Congress and a secretary of interior. And my father was the very first public health dentist in New Mexico and my mom was one of the very first advocates for special education and appropriate home services for children with disabilities. So I come at this naturally and also enjoy a really long, wonderful career advocating for women and families.

MS. ERBE: Women's issues are important to Lujan Grisham.

REP. GRISHAM: Job creation and the economy, these are women's issues. We're often the last line of economic security for our families. We're still fighting for equal pay. It affects our ability to do education and childcare. And in my situation, where I've got an adult daughter who's going back to college and a mother who lives with me, I'm her caretaker, that dealing with the caring of our aging parents, these are all economic security issues for women and their families.

MS. ERBE: Lujan Grisham believes in zero tolerance when it comes to the erosion of women's reproductive rights.

REP. GRISHAM: It's time to start by making sure that we never allow the debate or any of those issues to occur like they did with the war on women in the Congress ever again.

It is clear that many of the economic policies and getting the job creation or the economy moving didn't move at all because we were defending women's health care choices and women's rights or quality issues in general, and every piece of legislation was blocked or stalled as a result.

MS. ERBE: So she is ready to move forward. As a single mother, Lujan Grisham says policies in Washington need to be family friendly and take into account the millions of households headed by single women.

REP. GRISHAM: We need to make sure that we're protecting Head Start and Early Childhood Education. And I will tell you that transportation issues, particularly in a state like mine that doesn't have an effective public transportation system, this really changes the opportunities for jobs and economic security for women and their children. And I'm really excited about the opportunity to make sure that we got the Violence against Women's Act. This is another issue that plagues single households, often the cause of that situation.

MS. ERBE: She's a lifelong advocate of health care for senior citizens and plans to continue that work.

REP. GRISHAM: I don't want us to forget in health care reform that long-term care and the aging of America are significant issue and, quite frankly, in terms of the budget issues and financial security issues I think will be more difficult to tackle successfully. I want to be one of those advocates on the state of New Mexico that talks about the benefits of Medicaid expansion and making sure that infrastructure investments for public health and hospitals gets done in a meaningful way.

MS. ERBE: During her time in office, Lujan Grisham will push for policies that help women make decisions that are both good for themselves and their families.

REP. GRISHAM: If I have to choose between supporting my children to go to college or taking care of my parents or paying for additional benefits outside of my new essential benefits plan, under the Affordable Care Act, or putting food on the table, families begin to make choices that are not healthy for those families.

MS. ERBE: Lujan Grisham says she's optimistic and ready to work, especially with the Women's Caucus.

REP. GRISHAM: To the women that sounded the alarm and fought, you know, for me and my daughters, and – I appreciate that now I have an opportunity to join them, to carry the torch for future generations of women and their families.

MS. ERBE: That's it for this special edition of *To the Contrary*. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or @TotheContrary. And check our website, where the discussion continues. Whether you're in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time.

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