



Disability History and Awareness Month 2023

Tammy Duckworth

Senator Tammy Duckworth was Born in Bangkok, Thailand, and is a naturalized U.S. citizen through her father. Although she moved around various countries growing up, the Duckworth family eventually settled in Honolulu, Hawaii, where she graduated high school. Duckworth also participated in track and field and was awarded the Gold Award as a girl scout. Duckworth attended the University of Hawaii at Manoa, earning a Bachelor's degree in Political science, and at George Washington University, she received a Master of Arts in international affairs. Duckworth began a Ph.D. program at Northern Illinois University, which her war service interrupted. However, she returned to school and completed a Ph.D. in human services at Capella University in March 2015.



Duckworth joined the Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps in 1990 as a graduate student at George Washington University. She became a commissioned officer in the United States Army Reserve in 1992 and chose to fly helicopters because it was one of the few combat jobs open to women at that time. She was deployed to Iraq in 2004. She lost her right leg near the hip and her left leg below the knee from injuries sustained when the Black Hawk helicopter she was co-piloting was hit by an RPG; She was the first American female double amputee from the Iraq War. Duckworth received a Purple Heart on December 3 and was promoted to major on December 21 at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. She was also presented with an Air Medal and Army Commendation Medal. After receiving a medical waiver to continue serving, ten years later, she retired from the Illinois Army National Guard in October 2014 as a lieutenant colonel.

Profiles by Andrew Caruana, Policy and Research Intern, Office of Senator Sara Gelser Blouin

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Duckworth served as director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs from 2006 to 2009 after an unsuccessful House run. While director, she was credited with starting a program to help veterans with PTSD and brain injuries. She was then appointed assistant secretary for public and intergovernmental affairs at the United States Department of Veterans Affairs by then-President Obama, where she served from 2009 to 2011.

In 2012, Duckworth was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving two terms. She was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2016, defeating Republican incumbent Mark Kirk. Duckworth was credited with saving the Americans with Disabilities Act. Specifically, she led public opposition to a controversial bill, H.R. 620, and led 42 senators in pledging to oppose any effort to pass H.R. 620 through the Senate. The Veterans Service Organization and Paralyzed Veterans of America recognized Duckworth's leadership in defending the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Duckworth was the first Thai American woman elected to Congress, the first woman with a disability elected to Congress, and the first senator to give birth while in office – her child was the first baby ever to be allowed on the Senate floor per a rule change she advocated for.

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