Gabrielle Giffords is a gun control activist and a former politician from Tucson, Arizona. She became well known after she was shot in the head on January 8, 2011, while hosting a series of informal political talks outside a Safeway grocery store. A gunman, identified as Jared Lee Loughner, shot Giffords in the head at close range and fired his weapon at many others, ultimately taking the lives of six people. After a long and difficult recovery, Giffords returned to Congress, but she resigned in 2012 to concentrate on changing gun control laws. Giffords petitioned for a hearing among Senate Democrats to address the issue of gun violence against women in May of 2014. Her petition was answered in July of that year when the Judiciary Committee scheduled a hearing on the matter. The hearing was the first-ever Senate hearing on the intersection of gun violence and domestic violence.

Gabrielle Giffords was born on June 8, 1970, in Tucson, Arizona, to Spencer J. Giffords and Gloria Kay Fraser Giffords. She graduated from Tucson's University High School and received a bachelor of arts degree from Scripps College in Claremont, California, and a master's degree in regional planning from Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. She studied abroad in Chihuahua, Mexico, on a William Fulbright Scholarship. She also did research in San Diego on the effects of Operation Gatekeeper II on the San Ysidro Port of Entry. Giffords was a fellow at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. After she finished college, she worked at her family's tire company and eventually became interested in politics. She was the third woman in Arizona's history to be elected to serve in U.S. Congress and Arizona's first Jewish congresswoman. Before she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, she served in the Arizona House of Representatives and was the youngest woman ever elected to the Arizona State Senate. Giffords was a member of the Democratic Party, an avid motorcycle rider, a longtime gun owner, and a supporter of the Second Amendment. Her husband, Captain Mark Kelly was a navy pilot and an astronaut with the NASA space shuttle program.

Before Congress

Before Giffords entered the public arena, she worked as an associate for regional economic development at Pricewaterhouse Coopers in New York City. After that, she returned home to run her family's tire business, El Campo Tire Warehouses, which was founded by her grandfather. She served as the president and chief executive officer before selling the company to Goodyear Tire in 2000. Her struggles as a small business owner prepared her for the struggles she would face in her political career. She became a champion for the rights of small business owners, ensuring these businesses had access to the resources they needed.

Political Career

Giffords was elected to the Arizona House of Representatives in 2000 and spent two years in that capacity. In 2002 she was elected to the Arizona State Senate. She resigned from that position in 2005 to prepare for her run for Congress. On November 7, 2006, she was elected to U.S. Congress. She was reelected for a second term in 2008 and in 2010 secured a third term. She represented Arizona's Eighth Congressional District, which encompassed more than 9,000 miles, including a 114-mile border with Mexico. In addition to supporting small businesses, Giffords focused on rights for the military and their families and supported issues such as solar energy, immigration reform, future space exploration, fiscal responsibility, and government accountability.

Tragedy

On January 8, 2011, Giffords was shot in the head in a grocery store parking lot in Casas Adobes, Arizona, during an informal political gathering called Congress on Your Corner. The alleged suspect, Jared Lee Loughner, 22, was accused of pulling the trigger that injured 19 people: Giffords and 12 others were wounded by gunfire, and Loughner's bullets killed 6, including federal judge John McCarthy Rolle and a nine-year-old girl. A twentieth person was also reported to have been injured. Giffords underwent emergency surgery on January 8 to repair the damage to her brain. Nearly half of her skull was removed. A few days after the surgery, Giffords responded to doctors, gave the thumbs-up sign, and tried to pull on her breathing tube. As of the second week in January, she remained stable, was breathing on her own, and opened her eyes. Doctors waited to see how the damage to her brain would affect her future.

In late January, Giffords was moved to a hospital in Houston, Texas, to be near husband Kelly as he continued in his duties at the
In August of 2011, Giffords returned to Washington, DC, for the first time since being shot. She entered the floor of the House of Representatives just as members were voting on the bipartisan debt-ceiling compromise. She was one of the last representatives to enter her vote. She received a standing ovation from both Democrats and Republicans. The House minority leader, Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, applauded the return of Giffords, saying, “There isn’t a name that stirs more love, more admiration, more respect, more wishing for our daughters to be like her than the name of Congresswoman Gabby Giffords. Thank you, Gabby.” In November of 2011, Giffords and Kelly released a memoir titled Gabby: A Story of Courage and Hope, published by Scribner. The book recounts the lives of the two public servants, their romance, the tragic event that changed their lives, and the journey toward recovery.

Became Gun Control Activist

In January of 2012, Giffords resigned from Congress. The longtime gun owner and supporter of the Second Amendment then worked as a gun control activist to prevent further gun violence. In November of 2013, Jared Lee Loughner, the man who shot Giffords, injured 12 others, and killed 6 people, was sentenced to life in prison without parole. In early 2013, Giffords and Kelly formed the political action committee Americans for Responsible Solutions to spread their mission. Giffords and Kelly then testified at the January of 2013 Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on gun violence and urged Congress to pass stricter gun laws. Gifford was later part of an historic Senate hearing concerning gun violence against women in July of 2014. Giffords applauded Senator Patrick Leahy, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, for the landmark hearing. “I thank Chairman Leahy for ensuring that for the first time ever, the United States Senate will hold a hearing on how gun violence impacts America’s women, and the commonsense policies that will protect them from gun violence,” she said in a statement to media outlets. “This is a badly-needed step on the road toward action to make women and families safer from gun violence.”

AWARDS:
Tucson Business Edge, Woman of the Year; YWCA, Woman on the Move; Gannett News Service, America’s Eight Young Leaders Worth Watching; Charles Dick Medal of Merit; Arizona Family Literacy, Outstanding Legislator, 2003; Mental Health Association of Arizona, Woman of the Year, 2002; ATHENA International and Arizona Small Business Administration, National ATHENA Award, 2011; Honorary Military Spouse of the Year by Military Spouse magazine, 2011.

FURTHER READINGS:

Online


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