Gabrielle Giffords
Newsmakers. 2011.

Born: June 08, 1970 in Tucson, Arizona, United States
Other Names: Giffords, Gabby; Giffords, Gabrielle D.; Giffords, Gabrielle Dee
Nationality: American
Occupation: Congressional representative (U.S. federal government)

It was eight months before Gabrielle Giffords learned of the fatal shooting in a Tucson Safeway parking lot. A victim of the shooting herself, the U.S. Representative from Arizona was shot in the head at the Congress on Your Corner event. Her husband, Mark E. Kelly, and other loved ones wanted to keep the news from her that her aide Gabe Zimmerman, close friend U.S. District Judge John Roll, and nine- year-old Christina-Taylor Green had been killed in the violent rampage, which claimed six lives in total with thirteen others wounded. Giffords' miraculous recovery took a great deal of her energy and on August 1, 2011, she appeared on Capitol Hill to vote in the important federal debt ceiling legislation.

Giffords' name may not have become so familiar outside of her congressional district if not for the tragic events that occurred on January 8, 2011, just three days after she was sworn in for her third term. Giffords is known for being friendly and kind, focusing on political issues that she believes passionately in, and making certain that the voices of those she represents are heard. She went that Saturday afternoon to the Safeway parking lot to personally meet her constituents, listen to their concerns, and to answer questions. As she met people at what was to be the first of several informal talks in various neighborhoods, Jared Lee Loughner shot Giffords in the head at close range. He then turned his gun on the crowd and shot many innocent bystanders and murdered six people. Loughner was eventually sent to a federal prison facility in Springfield, Missouri, after a federal judge deemed that he was mentally incompetent to stand trial on the 49 charges brought against him.

The incident quickly became politicized and polarized both conservatives and liberals despite Giffords' position as a moderate Democrat who has belonged to the Blue Dog coalition. The Blue Dogs are known for advocating fiscal responsibility, regulating immigration, and developing better relations with the Latin American countries. Giffords, being the only representative with an active serviceman as a spouse, has sat on the Armed Services committee. She has also sat on the Foreign Affairs and Science and Technology committees and is a proponent of an alternative energy policy. Even though she is the type of Democrat that the Republicans like to work with, she was targeted by the Tea Party to be voted out of office and they unsuccessfully ran a Tea Party activist against her in the previous election.

There was much controversy in the wake of the shooting because former vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin had posted a graphic on her Web site that showed Giffords' district in gunsight crosshairs, indicating that she was targeted to be elected out of office because of Giffords' vote on the federal Health Care Reform Bill. Giffords' office was also vandalized because of her voting for the Health Care Reform Bill. Liberals used these facts to point to a conservative conspiracy. Conservatives pointed fingers back, saying that the liberal media was distorting the facts. There was discussion about how far the rhetoric should go in campaigning and political discourse and whether or not it was appropriate to advocate for "targeting" an opponent or holding target shooting events as political fund-raisers.

In the meantime, Giffords went through trauma surgery and then was transferred to the Memorial Hermann Hospital in Houston, Texas, where she began the long road to recovery. A memorial service was held for the victims of the shooting and, at that event, President Barack Obama himself announced the first good news about Gifford. He reported to the public that she had opened her eyes.

Giffords was born on June 8, 1970 to Spencer J. and Gloria Kay Frazer Giffords. Intelligent, passionate, and aware, she pursued first a bachelor's degree from Scripps College and then a master's degree in regional planning from Cornell University. Because of her outstanding academic abilities she was a William Fulbright scholarship recipient and studied in Chihuahua, Mexico. She also did research on the effects of Operation Gatekeeper II on the San Ysidro Port of Entry in San Diego. After her education was complete, Giffords worked as an associate for regional economic development at Price Waterhouse in New York City. From there she returned to her hometown of Tucson to take over the family business, which had been founded by her grandfather. She served as the president and chief executive officer of El Campo Tire Warehouse until it was sold to the Goodyear Tire Company in 2000. These experiences in the world of business helped prepare Giffords to understand the needs of business and to give her a unique understanding of factors that contribute to a successful climate for small business owners. This knowledge helped her in her bid for political office.

Giffords, who is a motorcycle-riding, gun-rights advocating woman of Jewish descent, was first elected to the Arizona House of Representatives in 2000. She then was elected in 2002 to the Arizona State Senate. She resigned before the end of her term in 2005 so that she could run for the U.S. Congress. Giffords was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives on November 7, 2006. After this she won successive terms in office in 2008 and again in 2010. She represents Arizona's Eighth Congressional District, which
encompasses more than 9,000-square miles and shares a 114-mile border with Mexico. In addition to advocating for small businesses, Giffords worked on technology legislation and on furthering space exploration, is a proponent of the alternative energy policy that includes renewable sources of energy such as solar energy, and has consistently fought for border security.

It is no surprise that Giffords has advocated for legislation to benefit both service personnel and their families and to further technology and space exploration because Giffords' husband Mark E. Kelly is a U.S. navy captain, a naval aviator who flew during the Gulf War, and an astronaut. Kelly has been aboard four different space shuttle missions in differing capacities, including one in May 2011, only months after Giffords' gunshot injury. Giffords traveled to Florida for the launch; she had been at every shuttle launch to see him off into space since they met. C. J. Karamargin, Giffords' communication director, was quoted by USA Today's Donna Leinwand Leger as saying, "The congresswoman is one of the most ardent champions of the space program in Congress because of the power it has shown through its history to ignite the curiosity and imagination of America's school children." As the chairwoman of the House committee on Science and Technology, Giffords was glad that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) received a proposal for increased funding to the space program for 2010, but she and the rest of the committee expressed concern that the direction Obama was proposing for NASA was a divergence from Project Constellation, an aim for NASA for a number of years. The concerns around having NASA shift its direction were based on already developed and developing technology and the highly educated and specialized personnel required to do the research and development. In 2009 States News Service quoted Giffords as saying, "NASA's technology development activities are critical not just to NASA's future, but to the quality of life of our citizens and our nation's competitiveness." She went on to give the example of the extensive number of NASA-developed technologies that have made the U.S. commercial aeronautics industry possible and pointed out that the widespread availability and safety of airplanes was only made possible because of NASA.

Giffords, who represents sunny Arizona, is an advocate for solar energy. One of the issues that Giffords is passionate about is creating a federal energy policy that focuses on sustainable energy. Giffords was quoted by States News Service as saying in regards to the Pentagon holding a forum on sustainable energy, "Our military leaders clearly understand that reducing our dependence on fossil fuels is essential for the safety of our troops. This is an issue of national security." Giffords also introduced a bill in 2010 titled "Department of Defense Energy Security Act." The purpose of the bill was to reduce the Pentagon's annual fuel costs through such measures as using biofuels for aviation and creating a number of large-scale renewable energy projects. Giffords has also promoted alternative energy projects in the private sector. She has spoken at the groundbreaking or initiation of several projects having to do with solar energy, including an event in 2010 when the National Bank of Arizona first turned on the power for their two million dollar solar energy system. In 2010 she welcomed to Tucson the participants in the Zero Emissions Race. The objective of the race was not to be the fastest vehicle, but rather it was a race to make smaller, greener, more efficient vehicles popular.

Giffords' congressional district is very large, encompassing such cities as Tucson and Tombstone and sharing a border with Mexico. After Cochise county rancher Rob Krentz was killed on isolated part of his ranch by what were believed to be members of a drug cartel, Giffords made an appeal to Obama to send in National Guard troops to help patrol the Mexican border. While Krentz's killers were never apprehended, they were tracked to within 20 miles of the Mexican border. Frequent skirmishes between the border patrol and drug cartel members in the early 21st century have found the border patrol seriously outnumbered and outgunned. Giffords has made the case that patrolling the border is both an immigration issue and an issue of national security. After sending Obama two requests for deployment of the National Guard, she joined a group of lawmakers from five states to send a strongly worded letter requesting assistance. In regards to these requests, the States News Service reported Giffords as saying, "Border security is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue, it's an American issue. Every American, no matter which party they belong to or where they live, is deeply concerned about restoring law and order in our border communities.... President Obama needs to immediately deploy the National Guard and send a clear message to the drug cartels: We will fight you, we will stop you, and we will never waiver in our commitment to securing our border."

When the state of Arizona passed a law mirroring federal immigration laws, making it a state offense to not be in compliance with such requirements as carrying identification and immigration status papers, and allowing state law enforcement personnel to enforce the state law, there was an uproar. State police officers could stop a person for a routine traffic violation and if the person could not produce a state driver's license, indicating that they may be in the state illegally, that individual could be arrested in violation of the state law, there was an uproar. State police officers could stop a person for a routine traffic violation and if the person could not produce state law enforcement personnel to enforce the state immigration law. There was a general boycott of the state of Arizona in response to the immigration law. Giffords, while stating that she personally did not agree with the law that had been passed by a large majority of state voters, appealed to the many agencies and organizations that cancelled conventions that were to be held in the state of Arizona. She also criticized two federal agencies that boycotted the state in regards to the immigration law and asked that they consider the many people within the state whose jobs might be lost in a recessive economy if all the conventions and events were cancelled.

Ever intelligent, aware, and a fighter, Giffords has been engaged in many battles as Arizona's Representative to the U.S. Congress. She has fought for the beleaguered NASA space program, petitioned for a sustainable energy policy, been a fierce advocate to maintain the borders of southern Arizona, and has survived an assassination attempt.

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

CAREER:
Senate, 2003-05; congressional representative, U.S. House of Representatives, 2007--.

Member: Congressional Motorcycle Caucus; Tohono Chul Park; Beat Cancer Boot Camp; Metropolitan YMCA; 162nd Air National Guard Fighter Wing Minutemen Committee; Blue Dog Coalition; U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council; Anti-Defamation League Arizona Regional Board; chairwoman, Energy and Environment Subcommittee; Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere; House Foreign Affairs Committee; chairwoman, Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee; U.S.-Mexico Interparliamentary Group; House Committee on Science and Technology; Armed Services Committee; Hadassah.

AWARDS:

FURTHER READINGS:

Books


Periodicals

States News Service, October 22, 2009; February 25, 2010; April 28, 2010; June 22, 2010; July 8, 2010; August 18, 2010; October 15, 2010; October 22, 2010; October 27, 2010; November 22, 2010.
USA Today, April 29, 2011, p. 5A; August 3, 2011, p. 6A.

Online

Biography in Context, Gale, 2011.

Source Citation (MLA 8th Edition)

Gale Document Number: GALE|K1618005518