



**Saturday, June 15, 2013**  
**Democratic Women Elected Officials Panel**

**The Honorable Tammy Duckworth, U.S. Congress**

Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth is an Iraq War Veteran and former Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Duckworth attended college at the University of Hawaii and then went on to the George Washington University, where she earned a Masters of Arts in International Affairs. Following graduation, Duckworth, who is fluent in Thai and Indonesian, moved to Illinois, where she began pursuing a Ph.D. in Political Science at Northern Illinois University. While at NIU she also worked at the School of Nursing researching public health and environmental causes of cancer. Later Ms Duckworth worked for Rotary International as a manager for administration of Rotary's clubs in the Asia Pacific Region.

In 2004, Duckworth was deployed to Iraq as a Blackhawk helicopter pilot for the Illinois Army National Guard. She was one of the first Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom until her helicopter was hit by an RPG on November 12, 2004. Duckworth lost her legs and partial use of her right arm in the explosion and was awarded a Purple Heart for her combat injuries.

Duckworth spent the next year recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. As one of the highest-ranking patients, she quickly became an advocate for her fellow Soldiers and testified before Congress about caring for our Veterans and wounded warriors.

Following her recovery, Duckworth ran for Congress in 2006. After a narrow loss, she became Director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. In Illinois, she worked to create a tax credit for employers who hired Veterans, established a first-in-the-nation 24/7 crisis hotline for Veterans, and developed innovative programs to improve Veterans' access to housing and health care.

In 2009, President Obama appointed Duckworth to be Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs. At VA, Duckworth led an initiative to end homelessness among Veterans. She created the Office of Online Communications to improve the VA's accessibility, especially among young Veterans,

and also worked to address the unique challenges that Native American and female Veterans face.

Duckworth ran for Congress in 2012 to advocate for the practical solutions and cooperation needed to rebuild our economy and ensure that every American has a chance to achieve the American Dream.

Duckworth lives in Hoffman Estates with her husband Bryan, an Army Major. Since her recovery, Duckworth has taken up scuba diving, surfing, skydiving and flies as a civilian pilot. Fulfilling a promise she made at Walter Reed, she has also completed several marathons. She has resumed her Ph.D. studies at Northern Illinois University and is also working toward a Ph.D. in Health and Human Services at Capella University. In her spare time, she volunteers at local food pantries and enjoys couponing and flea markets. Duckworth declined a military medical retirement and continues to drill as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Illinois Army National Guard.

## **The Honorable Robin Kelly, U.S. Congress**

Congresswoman Robin Kelly was elected to represent Illinois' 2nd District on April 9, 2013.

As a former State Representative, Kelly brings extensive legislative experience to the 2nd District. She successfully sponsored bills to protect consumers from fraud, support economic development and increase the minimum wage. She also led the fight for landmark legislation to protect victims of domestic violence and improve public safety.

During her tenure in the Illinois Legislature, Kelly mentored progressive candidates and encouraged new leaders, including one of her colleagues, Barack Obama, in his successful 2004 bid for U.S. Senate. Most recently, Kelly was Chief Administrative Officer of Cook County, where she was responsible for managing the day-to-day operations and implementing policy for the second largest county in the United States.

Kelly has also served as chief of staff in the Illinois State Treasurer's Office. As the first African American woman to serve as chief of staff for a constitutional officer in Illinois, Kelly pursued a progressive agenda rooted in promoting small business job creation, investment strategy innovation, eliminating food deserts and advancing financial literacy in underserved areas. She also helped to transform the Treasurer's Office – an agency that manages as much as \$17 billion in state funds – by improving efficiencies, streamlining expenses and demanding stronger ethical guidelines.

A New York native, Kelly moved to Illinois after high school to attend Bradley University in Peoria, where she earned her B.A. in psychology and a M.A. in counseling. She later received a Ph.D. in political science from Northern Illinois University.

Kelly serves on a number of boards and commissions, including the Cook County Human Rights Commission, the Hate Crimes Commission and the board of the Center for Tax and Budget

Accountability. She also serves as a Bradley University Trustee and is a board member of the Bradley University Council. In 2009, she was inducted into the university's Centurion Society for honored alumni. She is also an active member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc.

Kelly lives in Matteson with her husband, Dr. Nathaniel Horn and has two adult children, Kelly and Ryan.

## **The Honorable Linda Holmes, Illinois Senate**

State Senator Linda Holmes was elected to represent the 42nd legislative district in 2006. As a former small business owner, she brings a business-conscious perspective to the legislature, ensuring state government protects the hard-working people of Illinois.

An Aurora resident since 1983, Holmes has been extremely active serving on a number of neighborhood committees and community organizations. Prior to being elected as state senator, Holmes served for two years on the Kane County Board. Her experience on the county board shaped her strong belief in local control and her advocacy for letting local government and its residents have a voice in making decisions that impact their community.

Holmes has been the Chief Sponsor on a myriad of legislation during her time in office that encourages job growth and impacts education, health care, and veterans' issues.

As a former owner of a remodeling company, Holmes knows firsthand how important sound infrastructure and construction are to our State. The construction industry provides good-paying jobs for hundreds of thousands of Illinois working families. Holmes was a vocal leader behind the \$31 billion capital construction project that passed in 2009 and continues to advocate for community improvement projects to repair roads, bridges, hospitals and schools.

As a member of the Classrooms First Commission, Holmes has attended hearings to gather information about consolidation and the best practices to maximize efficiency within school districts. She has also sponsored legislation to update physical fitness standards and promote physical education programs in our schools throughout Illinois.

Having lived with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for over 20 years, Holmes is very concerned about health care issues in Illinois and remains dedicated to providing individuals with sufficient physical therapy access, ensuring a healthier lifestyle and better quality of life. She feels very fortunate that she is able to lead a healthy and active life and remains passionate about supporting those who have faced physical disability. Holmes has worked closely with the MS Society and sponsored several bills, including legislation that requires hospitals and nursing homes to adopt safe patient handling policies.

Holmes is a dedicated and hard-working public official, currently serving as Chairperson of the Senate State Government and Veterans' Affairs committee. She also serves as the Vice-Chair of the Senate Labor committee and is an active member of the Senate Local Government, Agriculture and Conservation, and Gaming committees.

## **The Honorable Deborah Conroy, Illinois House**

Deb Conroy is serving her first term as State Representative of the 46th District, which includes all or parts of Villa Park, Elmhurst, Lombard, Addison, Glen Ellyn, Glendale Heights, Carol Stream and Bloomingdale.

Conroy is a local volunteer, mother, and community leader from Elmhurst. She will use her spirit of service to bring common-sense solutions to some of the state's most serious challenges.

Conroy's legislative priorities include creating good-paying jobs to encourage local economic development, providing critical tax relief to homeowners and working to prevent property tax increases when home values decline, balancing the state budget and ensuring state government lives within its means, and strengthening area schools. Conroy believes that during these difficult economic times, lawmakers should lead by example by cutting their own pay.

As a local volunteer, Conroy has worked to raise money for local charities. Her most prominent project is coordinating an annual fundraiser for the Elmhurst Children's Assistance Foundation to raise money for sick and disabled children in the community.

The mother of four sons, Conroy has been active in our local schools. Conroy has worked hard to ensure accessible public education for all local students, helping to form the not-for-profit York Student Enrichment Team to help pay school fees for families experiencing financial difficulties. During her term on the District 205 School Board, she focused on ensuring special needs students were able to receive an education.

Conroy volunteers her time to her community. She taught religious education at her church for 16 years, is active in the PTA, and volunteered as an art teacher for a local preschool. Conroy also worked tirelessly to ensure special needs children were placed in a safe learning environment.

Conroy and her husband, Tim, reside in Elmhurst and have four sons.

## **The Honorable Kathleen Willis, Illinois House**

Kathleen Willis is serving her first term in the Illinois General Assembly as State Representative of the 77th District, which includes O'Hare Airport and portions of Addison, Bellwood, Bensenville, Franklin Park, Maywood, Melrose Park, Northlake, Stone Park, and Wood Dale.

As a full-time state representative, Kathleen's top priorities are to improve access to quality education, prevent unfair property tax increases on local families, make our neighborhoods safer by keeping deadly assault weapons off our streets and out of the hands of criminals, and

work to get Illinois' state government and economy back on the right track. She is leading by example by not accepting a pension for state lawmakers and she supports legislation that will make it harder for legislators to raise their own pay.

Prior to her election as state representative, Kathleen worked as coordinator of access services at Elmhurst College Library and a part-time teacher of children's and adolescent literature.

Kathleen has always been an active member of her community. A mother of four, she served three terms as a member of the Addison Elementary District 4 school board, volunteering her time without pay to help give local children a better education. As a member of the American Association of University Women, she helped to found and organize the "Dare to Dream" program, mentoring young Hispanic girls and their mothers to make good choices to promote education and combat truancy. She has also served as vice president of the Kiwanis Club, chair of the Addison Special Events Commission and she organized the Mayor's Community Charity Ball.

Kathleen has a bachelor's degree in Human Services Administration from Elmhurst College and a master's degree in Library and Information Services from the University of Illinois. She and her husband, Tom, reside in Addison and they have four children.

## **The Honorable Karen Yarbrough, Cook County Recorder**

Native of Washington, D.C., a licensed real estate broker and insurance agent; Recorder Yarbrough is a full time administrator for Cook County Illinois. She has a B.A. in Business Management from Chicago State University and an M.A. in Inner City Studies from Northeastern Illinois University. She has served on numerous boards, enhancing the quality of life for citizens and has received many prestigious awards highlighting her advocacy, community service and legislative work. In 2011, she was selected for the position of Assistant Majority Leader in the House, a role that allowed her to be a stronger advocate for her district and the people of Illinois.

In 2009 she helped pass the most significant package of ethics reform in many years, getting to the heart of the "pay to play" apparatus that allowed our former governor to sell Illinois to the highest bidder. She also passed the first comprehensive public works program in ten years to create jobs and stimulate the economy through infrastructure improvements.

Karen's legislative themes were public health, public safety, and social justice. She was a stalwart fighter to increase assistance for those incarcerated, and funding for programs that provide a "Second Chance." She was the leading spokesperson in Springfield for Cease-Fire, the innovative anti-violence program that relies on cooperation and community involvement rather than police force and violence. In 2007, Karen successfully fought the tobacco lobby as the chief sponsor of "Smoke Free Illinois" and made Illinois the first Midwestern state to go "smoke-free." She's taken on powerful real estate interests in her pursuit of "source of income" legislation that prohibits landlords from refusing to rent to those on subsidies. In 2011, Yarbrough, as chief House Sponsor helped make history by passing legislation to end the

death penalty in Illinois. This legislation was signed into law by Gov. Pat Quinn making it the 16<sup>th</sup> state to do so.

Karen and her husband, Henderson, the Mayor of the village of Maywood, have a blended family of six and share twelve grandchildren.

## **The Honorable Cristina Castro, Kane County Board**

Cristina Castro of Elgin was first elected to represent the 20th on Kane County Board in 2008. During her first term, Commissioner Castro served on several committees, Finance and Budget, Energy and Environmental, Administration, Legislative, and the Judicial and Public Safety committee. Castro was re-elected to the board in 2012 where she was appointed as chairman of Human Services and serves on the county's Finance and Budget and Executive committees. In March 2013, Governor Pat Quinn appointed Commissioner Castro to Illinois Housing Development Authority. Cristina Castro is a marketing and public relation specialist at Elgin Community College and has a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Bachelor of Science degree from Northern Illinois University.