



Image courtesy of the Member

Tulsi Gabbard 1981–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE 2013–
DEMOCRAT FROM HAWAII

As one of the first female combat veterans elected to Congress, Tulsi Gabbard entered the U.S. House of Representatives with a high profile that quickly earned her prominent committee and party positions. Gabbard developed a reputation for reaching across the aisle and advocating for military servicemembers and veterans. “People at home don’t care whether you’ve got a D or R in front of your name,” she said. “They want you to get things done.”¹

Tulsi Gabbard was born in American Samoa on April 12, 1981, the daughter of teachers and entrepreneurs, Mike and Carol Gabbard. As a teenager, she cofounded with her father the Healthy Hawai‘i Coalition, a nonprofit organization focused on educating children about clean water and protecting Hawaii’s environment.² In 2002, at age 21, Gabbard became the youngest woman elected to the Hawaii house of representatives.³

Gabbard enlisted in the Hawaii Army National Guard in April 2003.⁴ Although she was not on the mandatory deployment roster, Gabbard left her re-election campaign and volunteered to deploy to Iraq with her unit, the 29th Infantry Brigade Combat Team, so she could stand alongside her fellow soldiers. She served a 12-month tour at Logistical Support Area Anaconda in Iraq, working in a field medical unit.

After returning from her deployment, Gabbard rejoined her nonprofit and led an investigation into beach pollution.⁵ In 2006 U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka’s office hired her as a legislative aide. She completed Officer Candidate School at the Lyman Ward Military Academy in Alabama in 2007, becoming the first woman to earn the distinguished honor graduate title in the academy’s 50-year history. In 2009 Gabbard again voluntarily deployed with her unit to Kuwait, where she served as a military police platoon leader and trainer for the Kuwait National Guard’s counterterrorism unit.

In that same year, Gabbard completed a bachelor’s degree in international business through Hawaii Pacific University. In 2010 she was elected to the Honolulu city council, where she served as chair of safety and government affairs and vice chairman of budget.⁶

In May 2011, Gabbard announced her candidacy for Hawaii’s 2nd Congressional District that encompassed suburban and rural Oahu and all the neighboring islands. She entered a six-person Democratic primary race led by former Honolulu Mayor Mufi F. Hannemann. Gabbard attracted support from progressive and environmental organizations.⁷ She won the primary by more than

20 percent.⁸ She highlighted President Barack Obama's support for veterans during a prominent slot at the 2012 Democratic National Convention.⁹ Gabbard cruised to victory against Republican opponent Kawika Crowley, garnering 79 percent of the vote.¹⁰

The 113th Congress (2013–2015) featured a record number of Congresswomen. Gabbard stood out as one of the first female combat veterans elected to Congress and as the first practicing Hindu elected to Congress. She chose to take her oath of office on the *Bhagavad-Gita As It Is*.¹¹ Democratic leadership chose Gabbard as vice chair of the Democratic National Committee. She also obtained assignments to three committees: Armed Services, Homeland Security, and Foreign Affairs. In the 113th Congress, she left Homeland Security to serve on the Armed Services Committee, reflecting her own military service and the large military presence in her district.

In her first term, Gabbard introduced the Helping Heroes Fly Act (H.R. 1344) to improve the treatment of severely injured and disabled veterans going through airport security. She noted the everyday hardship this caused and stressed “the difference between a smooth and dignified screening experience or one that is filled with frustration, shame, and pain” was important, especially for injured veterans. President Obama signed the bill into law in 2013.¹²

She joined the bipartisan outcry against “deep and systemic issues” in the Department of Veterans Affairs, requesting an executive order allowing veterans to use their veteran IDs to get private medical care.¹³ She also called for reforms to how the military handles sexual assault cases, claiming legislation would “stem the growing cancer of sexual assault on men and women in the military.”¹⁴

Gabbard ran unopposed in the August 2014 primary. She again defeated the GOP challenger, Crowley, with roughly 79 percent of the vote. In the 2016 general election, Gabbard won with 76 percent of the vote. In April 2015, Gabbard married cinematographer Abraham Williams.¹⁵

Echoing her opposition to the Iraq War and the overthrow of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Gabbard has strongly opposed U.S. military action to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian civil war. In her second term, she introduced H.R. 4108 to prohibit the use of U.S. funds for the provision of assistance to Syrian opposition groups and individuals with that aim.¹⁶

NOTES

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- 2 Lynda Arakawa, “State's Political Balance Shifting in Legislature,” 6 November 2002, *Honolulu Advertiser*: 1A.
- 3 Kevin Dayton, “Lingle Spent \$5.4M to Win Governor's Race,” 6 December 2002, *Honolulu Advertiser*: 1B.
- 4 Espanol Zenaida Serrano, “State Legislator ‘Honored’ to Serve,” 20 April 2003, *Honolulu Advertiser*: 25A.
- 5 Eloise Aguiar, “Sand Clean at 4 Sites, Test Finds,” 22 April 2006, *Honolulu Advertiser*: 1B.
- 6 Rob Shikina, “Medical Waste Continues to Wash Up at West Oahu Beaches,” 16 January 2011, *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*: n.p.
- 7 B. J. Reyes, “Governor's Wife, Other Women Back Gabbard,” 15 April 2012, *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*: n.p.; B. J. Reyes, “Democratic Primary Will Likely Determine House Race,” 25 June 2012, *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*: n.p.
- 8 Gordon Pang, “Gabbard Upsets Hannemann,” 11 August 2012, *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*: n.p.
- 9 “Gabbard at Dem Convention: Obama Best for Vets,” 5 September 2012, *Associated Press*.
- 10 Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Election-Statistics/Election-Statistics/>.
- 11 Matthew Brown, “Tulsi Gabbard, First Hindu in Congress, to Take Oath over the Bhagavad Gita,” 12 November 2012, *Deseret Morning News*: n.p.
- 12 *Congressional Record*, House, 113th Cong., 1st sess. (21 May 2013): H2819–2825; Helping Heroes Fly Act, Public Law 113-27, 127 Stat. 503 (2013).
- 13 Chris D'Angelo, “Vets ‘We Have to Do Better’; Congresswoman Gabbard Says Veterans Deserve Immediate Care,” 3 June 2014, *The Garden Island*: n.p.; Janis L. Magin, “Hawaii Veterans Have Longest Waits for Appointments as New Patients,” 9 June 2014, *Pacific Business News*: n.p.
- 14 Stewart Powell, “Military Sexual-Assault Bills Compete; Senators' Vote on 2 Measures Approaching,” 6 March 2014, *San Antonio Express-News*: A7.
- 15 Emmarie Huettelman, “Tulsi Gabbard, Rising Democratic Star From Hawaii, Makes Mark on Party by Defying It,” 28 November 2015, *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/us/politics/tulsi-gabbard-rising-democratic-star-from-hawaii-makes-mark-on-party-by-defying-it.html> (accessed 29 February 2016); Helena Andrews-Dyer, “Tulsi Gabbard's Getting Married Today,” 9 April 2015, *Washington Post*: n.p.; Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present.”
- 16 See Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, “Reps. Tulsi Gabbard, Austria, Scott Introduce Legislation to End Illegal War to Overthrow Syrian Government of Assad,” press release, 19 November 2015, <http://gabbard.house.gov/index.php/press-releases/520-reps-tulsi-gabbard-austin-scott-introduce-legislation-to-end-illegal-u-s-war-to-overthrow-syrian-government-of-assad>.