

# 'Mom' Duckworth forced historical changes in Senate

BY ANGELA DENK  
adenk@hfchronicle.com

U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) helped the Homewood-Flossmoor chapter of the League of Women Voters mark March as Women's History Month by pointing to her history-making moment of bringing her newborn onto the floor of the U.S. Senate, becoming the first U.S. senator to do so.

During her virtual discussion March 9, Duckworth spoke of giving birth to her second daughter, when she was newly elected to represent Illinois in the Senate. Rules for the U.S. House permit children up to age 12 to accompany their parents to work, but the Senate did not allow it.

"The Senate is a historically-bound, tradition-bound body. I needed to be able to vote, but I couldn't vote unless I was able to be on the [Senate] floor ... we started fighting for me to be able to bring my child with me," she said.

According to Duckworth, the win took approximately nine months.

She also discussed another one of her firsts — establishing a 24-hour veterans' crisis line as director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. Prior to her implementation of that program in Illinois, veteran hotlines were open only during standard business hours. As a veteran of the Iraq War, Duckworth champions veteran causes.

Duckworth suffered severe injuries when her helicopter was shot down. She lost both legs and has limited use of one arm. Still, she has no regrets for her years with the Illinois National Guard.

"I've always known how lucky I am to be an American ... On the battlefield in Iraq, my buddies didn't leave me behind," she said. "That is what gave me strength, and I swear to never leave anyone behind."

"I knew from my [experience] there were times at 3 in the morning when some of us veterans would be up talking to each other. We realized that we needed to get help for veterans on the weekends and in the middle of the night."

"Sometimes the time of greatest remorse is Sunday morning after you've self-medicated with drugs or alcohol — so we started talking to pastors. Pastors became the first line of help for a lot of veterans."

Duckworth's 24-hour model eventually spread to the national stage. In 2007, the federal Veterans Health Administration (VA) launched its 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line. According to the VA's website, the line has answered more than 1.6 million calls since its inception.

The topic of the war in Ukraine came up twice during the program that had 70 virtual attendees.

When asked what the U.S. has learned about Russian leader Vladimir Putin, the senator said: "We now know how ruthless he is willing to be, and we realize that he is not going to stop. He doesn't care about the people of Russia — this is purely one man's ego, one man's war. The sanctions we have imposed are significant, and he is driving his own economy into the ground. He is not acting rationally."

Duckworth is seeking a second term in the Senate as the Democratic candidate in the Nov. 8 election.

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Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

Homewood Police Chief Denise McGrath, left, accepts gift cards from Advance Auto Parts store manager Mandy Lewis, center, and Deanna Layne, district manager. Police will hand out the gift cards during traffic stops. The store opened March 17 at 18026 Halsted St.



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