

A celebration of women in the 111th Congress

by Larry Kissell

In honor of all the women of the 8th Congressional district, and in celebration of the Women's History Month, I want to tell you a little bit about some of what I've done to address women's issues in the 111th Congress.

As your Congressman, I get the opportunity to meet remarkable people like Heather Ferguson, a Charlotte mom fighting to help her three-year-old son, and others like him, to get critical treatment for lymphedema. Heather struggled to get her health insurance to pay for the relatively-inexpensive treatment to help her son live a normal life without the serious complications of untreated lymphedema. She knew if she didn't do something, she would be fighting with this issue her entire life. So she took the issue to her state representative, another great woman, Tricia Cotham, and then, brought her issue to me. Together, we introduced legislation to ensure Medicare covers treatment for lymphedema sufferers.

One of the largest groups of lymphedema sufferers are cancer patients. The condition can be caused by cancer treatments that affect the lymphatic system. Breast cancer patients are especially susceptible to lymphedema.

Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in women ages 15 to 54. As we all know too well, one in eight of all women will get breast cancer in her lifetime. Yet, more than 60 percent of breast cancer occurrences are detected in early stages. If detected early, 96 percent of women are cancer-free after five years. Breast cancer can strike at any age.

As we know, educating our daughters about early detection is one of the most critical things we can do. In an effort to promote early detection, I have joined my colleagues in sponsoring a bill to increase breast cancer awareness in young women and provide support for young women diagnosed with breast cancer.

I am putting an emphasis on holding insurance companies more accountable for minimum hospital stays for breast cancer treatment. I have sponsored a bill to require minimum stays for mastectomies, lumpectomies and lymph node dissections in the course of breast cancer treatment. It would also require coverage for secondary consultations. Unfortunately, many rural medical facilities aren't equipped with the necessary mammogram systems. I have supported a bill to help address this need by expanding mobile mammography vehicle access, to help bring the necessary technologies and treatment to those that need it.

This week, I proudly joined with my colleagues to support an appropriation for the Department of Defense Peer-Reviewed Breast Cancer Research Program. I also voted to expand and improve health care services from the Department of Veterans Affairs available to women veterans, especially those serving in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Our brave female service members deserve to have their needs taken into consideration when receiving medical treatment.

Back in January, I sponsored a resolution recognizing the importance of cervical health and the early detection of cervical cancer. It was a resolution I was honored to sponsor. We are also working on diabetes research, treatment and education as well as fighting Sickle Cell Disease. I am a strong supporter and sponsor of H.R. 1032 which improves prevention, diagnosis and treatment of heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases in women. Heart disease is the number one killer of women in our country. It is vital that we continue to educate on ways to prevent heart disease in all of us.

Health issues are of course not the only issues important to women. One of the first bills I voted for was the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act. I was so proud to support this bill, which is designed to ensure equal pay for equal work. It overturned a 2007 Supreme Court decision that made it more difficult for women and others to pursue claims of pay discrimination. It is important to close the pay gap for women who work just as hard as their male counterparts.

In November, I voted to modify the Small Business Act to improve women's business centers. We need to continue encouraging female entrepreneurs, who are helping to create the small businesses which are driving our economic recovery.

I have been blessed in many ways during my life. Not the least of which is the four amazing women who help shape my view of the world - my mother Virene, my wonderful wife Tina and my amazing daughters Jenny and Aspen.

My 94-year-old mother is one of the strongest people I have ever met. She is a retired mathematics teacher and instilled in me a deep sense of community. She inspired me to pursue a career in teaching and helped give me the strength to run for Congress. My wife and daughters are my rock. These three generations of Kissell women amaze me every day.

I hope you will take a moment this month to thank the women in your life for everything they do.

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