

Tom Harkin U. S. Senator

Tom Harkin is a product of small town Iowa who has not forgotten his origins. He was born November 19, 1939 to a coal miner father and a Slovenian immigrant mother who passed away when Tom was ten years old. Tom, his three brothers and two sisters and their parents shared a two-bedroom home in Cumming, Iowa (population 150). Tom is a fourth generation Iowan, a father of two, a Navy veteran, and a graduate of Iowa State University.

Growing up, the Harkin children learned well the importance of family, community, responsibility, and hard work. Tom puts those lessons to work for Iowa. He has earned a reputation for giving a voice to those too often overlooked in Washington: working families, women, people with disabilities, children, students, seniors, family farmers, and small business owners. In Congress, Tom is a recognized leader in areas including education, health care and agriculture.

Tom worked various jobs through his youth, on farms, as a paper boy, on construction sites, and at a Des Moines bottling plant. After graduation from Dowling High School in Des Moines, he attended Iowa State University on a Navy ROTC scholarship. He earned his degree at ISU in Government and Economics.

Following graduation from ISU, Tom joined the Navy where he served as a jet pilot on active duty from 1962 to 1967 and afterwards continued to fly in the Naval Reserves. He is an active member of American Legion Post 562 in Cumming.

In 1968, Tom married Ruth Raduenz, the daughter of a farmer and a school teacher from Minnesota. Tom and Ruth have two daughters: Amy, born in 1976, and Jenny, born in 1981. Ruth currently works in the private sector.

Tom first came to Washington, D.C. in 1969 to join the staff of Iowa Congressman Neal Smith. As a staff member accompanying a congressional delegation to South Vietnam, he revealed to the world the infamous "tiger cages" inside a South Vietnamese prison camp at Con Son Island. Withstanding tremendous pressure to withhold the sensitive information, Tom's photographs and detailed account of the tiger cages were published in Life Magazine, exposing a cover-up and unearthing the shocking, inhuman conditions political prisoners were forced to endure. As a result, hundreds of tortured political prisoners were released.

In 1972, Tom and Ruth graduated from Catholic University of America Law School in Washington, D.C. and then returned to Iowa, settling in Ames. Tom worked as an attorney with the Polk County Legal Aid, assisting Iowans who could not otherwise afford legal help. Ruth won election as Story County Attorney.

Tom's commitment to finding fair and responsible solutions and promoting common sense reform has earned him broad-based support across Iowa. He first won election to the U.S. Congress from Iowa's Fifth Congressional District in 1974, defeating an incumbent in a long-standing Republican district.

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Tom served in the House of Representatives for ten years and, in 1984, he again challenged an incumbent, winning election to the U.S. Senate. Iowans returned him to the U.S. Senate in 1990, and again in 1996, making him the first Iowa Democrat ever to earn a third Senate term.

Tom pioneered the use of "Work Days" in Iowa, days spent on the job working alongside fellow Iowans to gain both practical experience and a hands-on understanding of Iowa's needs. He has worked as a cop on the beat, school teacher, farmer, bricklayer, nurse's aide, and construction worker. And Tom was the first Member of the U.S. Congress to have a Mobile Office, the familiar Harkin van which brings the services of the U.S. Congress to all of Iowa's 99 counties.

As chair and now ranking Democrat of the Senate education funding subcommittee, Tom has led efforts to improve education. He has worked to reduce class size, to give students better computer and Internet access, expand school counseling and other school safety programs, and improve teacher training. Tom has taken the lead in pushing to modernize America's crumbling schools. He secured funding for the "Harkin Grants" for the modernization and repair of Iowa's public schools. Tom is now promoting legislation that builds on the Iowa program to provide all children in our nation safe, modern school facilities conducive to world-class learning.

Tom is also a long-time leader in the fight to improve health care. As co-chair of the Senate Rural Health Caucus, he's successfully pushed legislation to bring health professionals to small towns and rural areas. As ranking Democrat on the Senate panel that funds most health programs, he's guided efforts to focus more on prevention and early intervention as a means of reducing costs and improving quality. Along with Republican Senator Arlen Specter, Tom has led the effort to double medical research funding to speed up cures for killers like cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's. He's put particular emphasis on women's health, doubling funding for breast cancer research and launching a national breast and cervical cancer early detection program.

Iowa leads the nation in the percentage of its population aged 85 and older and Tom has long been a stalwart supporter of senior citizens. He has fought to preserve and protect Social Security and Medicare and is now working to dedicate much of the budget surplus to shoring up these two vital programs. Tom has also led an effort to root out waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare and is now working to give seniors help with the rising costs of prescription drugs.

Tom's brother, Frank, was deaf since childhood, so Tom knows firsthand the challenges facing Americans with disabilities. He authored the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, the landmark legislation that protects the civil rights of more than 54 million Americans with physical and mental disabilities. He's also led efforts to improve educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

A lifelong advocate for America's family farms and rural communities, Tom Harkin has risen to be Chairman, and now ranking Democrat, of the Senate Agriculture Nutrition and Forestry Committee. He has promoted new uses and markets for our agricultural products, like ethanol, and fought to restore security to family farmers through improved farm income protection, increased support for conservation and better demand and prices for farm commodities. Tom has introduced legislation to improve food safety. He has also devoted attention and resources to revitalize the economies of Iowa's rural communities and small towns.

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