



New US Congress is Most Diverse in History

By: Carolyn Presutti - December 05, 2012

New US legislators, those taking office for the first time in January, are more diverse than at any other time in U.S. history. Barriers have been broken on ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. In fact, among the 200 Democratic representatives, women and those from various minority groups will outnumber straight white males.

Capitol Hill is daunting for any first year legislator, but imagine maneuvering it in a wheelchair.

Representative-elect Tammy Duckworth lost her legs when a rocket-propelled grenade slammed into her Blackhawk helicopter in Iraq.

Duckworth is the first female combat veteran and the first U.S. representative born in Thailand. In fact, the incoming legislators look more like the U.S. population than ever before, creating the most colorful Congress America has seen.

"I think it's fantastic," said Duckworth. "It reflects our nation -- our nation is more diverse. It is the strength of this nation. We come from all different backgrounds."

Like Tulsi Gabbard. She represents Hawaii and is the first Hindu member of Congress. And Sean Maloney, is an openly gay member.

"It will bring into the process voices that have been left out," said Maloney. "And I think that's always a good thing. That's the story of America, right?"

White men founded the country. White straight men are now the minority among House Democrats. These are changing times, says John Samples of the Cato Institute.

"That's the way the system is supposed to work," Samples explained. "The country changes, the demographic changes, there are political changes."

Republicans have not seen the same changes among their representatives. Of the 36 who are new, all are white. Just three are women. Republican Representative-elect Roger Williams says what matters is the goal.

"None of us came over on the same ship, but we are all on the same boat," said Williams.

But that "same boat" carries lawmakers with diverse priorities, stemming from the changing look of their districts.

Once they take office in January, some analysts predict passage of laws that are more inclusive, ones that will reflect the new faces of America.