Image courtesy of the Member

Deborah A. Stabenow

1950–

UNITED STATES REPRESENTATIVE, 1997–2001
UNITED STATES SENATOR, 2001–
DEMOCRAT FROM MICHIGAN

DURING HER MANY YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE in the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Michigan state legislature, Debbie Stabenow has earned a reputation as a hard-working leader focused on the issues directly impacting the daily lives of her constituents—issues like health care, education, and jobs. In 2000, she made history when she became the first woman to represent Michigan in the U.S. Senate. Four years later, her Democratic colleagues elected her Conference Secretary for the 109th Congress (2005–2007), the third-highest-ranking position in the party's Senate leadership.[1]

Deborah Ann Greer was born on April 29, 1950, in Gladwin, Michigan. She was raised in Clare, Michigan, graduated as valedictorian of her high school class, and attended Michigan State University, earning a bachelor's degree in 1972 and an M.S.W. in 1975. Greer married Dennis Stabenow; they raised two children and were divorced in 1990. Stabenow wed Tom Athans in 2003.

Debbie Stabenow worked in the Michigan public schools before being elected to the Ingham County board of commissioners in 1974 at the age of 24. She was the first woman and the youngest person ever to chair the board. In 1978, she was elected to the Michigan house of representatives, where she served until 1990. During that time Stabenow became the first woman to preside over the chamber. She was elected to the Michigan senate in 1990 and served four years. Stabenow's work as a state legislator helped reshape Michigan law and included a historic property tax cut, small business reforms, and nationally acclaimed legislation to protect children and families. Stabenow also wrote landmark laws addressing the issues of child support and the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

In 1996, Stabenow challenged a one-term incumbent, Republican Dick Chrysler, in central Michigan's Eighth U.S. Congressional District. She supported a balanced budget and led efforts to bring computers and the Internet to more schools and efforts for job expansion through the new technology-driven economy. She organized bus trips to Canada in search of cheaper prescription drugs and publicized the issue of high prescription costs. Stabenow won the election by a margin of 10 percentage points and, two years later, was re-elected with 57 percent of the vote.[2]

Once in Congress, Representative Stabenow earned a reputation as a moderate who worked with both Republicans and Democrats to get things done. "What I hear from people back home is, 'Forget the ideology. What are you doing to make government work in a way that helps my family every day?'" she said.[3] She was assigned to the Agriculture and Science committees.

In 1999, Stabenow announced her candidacy for one of Michigan's U.S. Senate seats. "It's about having the ability to get something done," Stabenow said of her desire to switch from the House to the Senate. "There are 435 people in the House. There are only 100 people in the Senate, and one person of either party can really get a lot done."[4] In a hard-fought campaign against one-term Republican incumbent Spencer Abraham, Stabenow prevailed in November 2000 with a margin of one percent of the vote.

Senator Stabenow's position as a moderate increased her influence when the Senate was split 50–50 at the start of the 107th Congress (2001–2003). She was assigned to four committees: Budget; Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs; Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry; and the Special Committee on Aging.

While in the Senate, Stabenow made health care her signature issue. Democrats chose her to co-chair their Senate Health Care Task Force. She authored and helped lead the passage of legislation in the U.S. Senate to reduce prescription drug prices by allowing states to negotiate lower prices and by providing citizens access to less expensive generic prescription drugs. She introduced legislation to permit the reimportation of prescription drugs sold in other countries for a fraction of the cost borne by American consumers.

On environmental matters, Stabenow authored a federal ban on drilling for oil and gas in the Great Lakes. She also mobilized thousands of citizens to stop the dumping of Canadian trash in Michigan and wrote successful legislation that required the inspection of Canadian trash trucks crossing Michigan's borders.[5] She led efforts to pass a $2 billion tax cut giving manufacturers incentives for job creation in the United States, rather than overseas and authored amendments to make it difficult for terrorists and drug dealers to launder the money that finances their criminal networks.

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Deborah Ann Stabenow," http://bioguide.gongress.gov

NOTES

1 *Politics in America, 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2001): 500; "Official Biography of Debbie Stabenow," http://stabenow.senate.gov/biography.htm (accessed 14 December 2004).

2 "Election Statistics, 1920 to Present," http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/index.html.

3 *Politics in America, 2002*: 500.

4 Ruby L. Bailey, "Hunger Fed by Need to Get Things Done; Talk with Longtime Ally Leads to Bid for Senate Campaign Dynamo: Debbie Stabenow," 26 October 2000, *Detroit Free Press*: 1A.

5 *Politics in America, 2004* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 504–505; "Official Biography of Debbie Stabenow."