

Jackie Walorski Seasoned Rookie Ready for Action

By Rebecca Patrick

Watching the gridlock of recent years propelled then state legislator Jackie Walorski to run for Congress. After a narrow defeat in 2010 to Joe Donnelly, she won the open second district seat (vacated by Donnelly in his successful U.S. Senate bid) in November.

The South Bend native is one of three new members of Indiana's congressional delegation, along with fellow Republicans Rep. Susan Brooks (5th District) and Rep. Luke Messer (6th District).

During her first few weeks in office, Walorski talked with BizVoice® about, among other things, hitting the ground running and her priorities for the near term.

BizVoice®: You served in the Indiana Legislature for six years. How did being a state representative better prepare you for Congress?

JW: "It was incredibly valuable. When I went to freshmen orientation and training here on the House floor, I had a better understanding and much clearer background on procedure. That's helpful for two reasons. One, it allows you to develop critical relations across the aisle, to work in a bipartisan manner. And one of the things you understand when you come in as a legislator is that it's all about relationships; it's all about working with folks who are like-minded. So I've made that a point."

BV: Have you sought or received any advice from current or former members of the Indiana congressional delegation?

JW: "The best piece of advice I've received has been to reach out across the aisle and to understand that relationships are what get you further down the road here – not just ideas. Everybody has ideas; it's the relationships that further those ideas. I've made a lot of great relationships with my fellow Democrats across the aisle, both men and women, who are interested in doing things, especially when it comes to protecting our veterans."

"I'm very encouraged and optimistic. It's really about doing what's right for Hoosiers. It's about not caring who gets the credit and not caring what party they are from that I think will be very beneficial. I'm very optimistic about it."

U.S. House Speaker John Boehner swears in Jackie Walorski to represent Indiana's Second District.

BV: The perception of Congress has not been great the past few years; we've seen record-low approval ratings. Does that sentiment factor into how you approach your activities?





The congresswoman (top left) took part in “Food Drop 2013”; the stocked boxes were delivered to Michiana food pantries.

JW: “It comes back to what your focus is. And my focus is on the issue of working together. Like every other voter and taxpayer, I sat there and watched this gridlock in D.C. just shut the place down.

“When I think about what goes on in my district and what I hear, they are fed up with politics and fed up with Washington. I just made it a very purposeful part of my first and second week here – even during orientation – to make sure to find people who are like-minded to help get things done.

“When it comes to issues in my age bracket, taking care of aging parents, making sure we take care of the generation of tomorrow, there is a heavy weight on Congress. My whole idea when I came into Congress was to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

“So I think the key is stay focused on the things that are really dear to you.”

BV: Anything surprised you in your first few weeks? What would you tell your constituents?

JW: “Not surprised so much, having been in the state Legislature before, but this is bigger. The keys are the same though. At the end of the day, we all want a better America. We all want a better economy. And we all want to make sure our kids have a future that is really better than the one we had.

“I’m honored and it’s humbling every day to walk into this place, and to know that we are making a difference. All the things they (my constituents) have told me I will absolutely bring to the table to hold government accountable.”

BV: What are your committee assignments and your priorities for those?

JW: “On the Budget Committee, I co-sponsored a bill, House Resolution 273, which freezes federal salaries and kind of seals the deal on an executive order the President had. The bill freezes the pay of the Vice President, the cabinet secretaries, members of Congress and federal employees. I think the American people thought it was an outrage when they were talking about raising the salaries of Congress members when they hadn’t done their

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job. This bill starts bringing accountability to this Congress that is way out of control.

“On the House Armed Services Committee, I’ll be serving on the Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee and Military Personnel Subcommittee. Those are critical for northern Indiana, with Grissom Air Reserve Base and the Indiana National Guard located there.

“The third committee is the House Veteran Affairs Committee. I’m a daughter of an Air Force veteran, so it’s extremely gratifying for me to actually sit on a committee that directly benefits veterans and their families.

“Our district is home to 53,000 veterans. We had our first opportunity on Martin Luther King Day to set up a booth in South Bend at a huge kind of veterans fair – and to be able to offer assistance on things from health care to educational opportunities and things veterans are looking for. We are going to provide as many benefits as we can for our veterans and their families.”

BV: What are your expectations for the fiscal cliff, part two – dealing with the spending and debt?

JW: “I did what I could do in terms of co-sponsoring that legislation to freeze pay. I think Congress has got to get serious and we’ve got to prove to the American people, not just in rhetoric but literally in getting serious about tightening the belt of this country when it comes to reducing spending. By allowing some of this transparency to come to light on what’s actually happening here is key. The concept of freezing pay, the concept of making sure we hold people accountable is at least a start in the right direction.

“In the Indiana Legislature, we came across the aisle and turned our massive deficit into a surplus, and Indiana today is one of the strongest economic states in the country with a ‘AAA’ bond rating. Coming from that background helps me stay focused here on the common sense things that Hoosiers believe in, and that’s really what I bring to the table. We may not get it all in one bill. We may not get it all in one day. But if we are able to move things like H.R. 273, it’s a step in the right direction.”

INFORMATION LINK

Resource: Congresswoman Jackie Walorski at <http://walorski.house.gov> or (202) 225-3915