

FROM 4-H TO THE HALLS OF CONGRESS

IN 2018, U.S. Senator **Marsha Blackburn** (R-Tenn) was elected as the first woman to represent the Volunteer State in the United States Senate. From serving in the U.S. House of Representatives for Tennessee's seventh district in 2003 to being sworn in as a U.S. Senator in 2019, Blackburn has proudly served the people of Tennessee as the fourth woman elected to Congress from the state.

Blackburn parlayed skills developed in 4-H and honed as an entrepreneur into a public service career on the national stage.

"I really appreciate the opportunity to solve problems for individuals and make certain that the federal government is working for them," Blackburn said.

As the senior senator from Tennessee, Blackburn serves on the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee; the Judiciary Committee; Veterans' Affairs Committee; and the Armed Services Committee.

Veterans issues, in particular, are near to Blackburn's heart. In both the Senate and the House, Blackburn has worked to address health care access and caregiver support for the country's veterans, with an emphasis on supporting and recognizing the country's female veterans, which account for 10 percent of those in service.

"We are honored to have the opportunity to work every day on behalf of our veterans to ensure they have access to all of their benefits," she said.

During her tenure as a U.S. Representative, Blackburn was also a champion for musicians, spearheading the Music Modernization Act, passed in 2018, which updated the music licensing landscape to provide protection for musicians and songwriters in the digital age. That

passion stemmed from Blackburn's start in public service as the executive director of the Tennessee Film, Entertainment and Music Commission in the mid-90s.

"When we look at things we've accomplished on the legislative front for our entertainment community in Nashville, I was able to achieve a tax policy change that helped our entertainers. I was able to achieve a legislative policy change that redefined the federal definition of small business to include our entrepreneurs, sole proprietors, independent contractors, and self-employed," said Blackburn, who minored in classical piano performance at Mississippi State.

In both the Senate and House, Blackburn has also focused on leveraging technology to improve the lives of the 60 million people who live in rural America with less access to services like health care. As cosponsor of the Rural America Health Corps Act, Blackburn aims to close service gaps and reduce health disparities across rural America. Additionally, her **SOFTWARE Act**, which passed in 2014 as part of 21st Century Cares, directed the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to modernize its approach to approving health care software to increase accessibility to innovative health care apps and tools for all Americans.

"I was responsible for developing, passing, and getting signed into law much of the legislation that deals with health IT, telemedicine, and the **SOFTWARE Act**, which puts many of these definitions in statutes," said Blackburn, who also noted her investment in increasing access to broadband for rural Americans.

As a U.S. Representative, Blackburn also served on six committees—Budget,

Education and the Workforce, Government Reform, Judiciary, Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming, and Energy and Commerce in which she helmed as chair of two subcommittees: Communications and Technology and Select Investigative Panel of the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Prior to her time in Congress, she served in the Tennessee State Senate beginning in 1998, where she led efforts to defeat a proposed state income tax. Prior to public service, she was the director of retail fashion and special events for the Castner Knott Company and founded Marketing Strategies, a marketing company focused on retail and media. She said her experience knowing how to lead serves her well in public service.

"One of the most important concepts I have always felt you can take from the private sector to the public sector is realizing that you lead people and manage assets," she said.

The Laurel, Mississippi native earned a national 4-H scholarship and chose to attend MSU.

"The program offered me the ability to study merchandising and marketing. When I attended, consumer economics and merchandising was in the Department of Home Economics," said Blackburn, who said many of her marketing courses were in the College of Business, where she is still a member of the advisory board.

Blackburn earned her bachelor's in 1973, working her way through college as one of the first female sales associates of the Southwestern Company, selling books door-to-door during summers.

Later as one of the company's first female sales managers, Blackburn



Senator Marsha Blackburn (photo submitted)

encouraged other women to sell for the company.

“I brought in friends from Mississippi State—women who are still friends to this day—who sold books and had a great time learning how to build their own business,” she said.

Blackburn said she appreciated the support of faculty and staff during her time at MSU.

“The faculty and staff at Mississippi State opened doors of opportunity because

everyone learns differently. By taking the time and personal interest and not being fearful of trying something different or letting someone individualize a study course for themselves, the MSU faculty and staff helps people learn and develop skills that will help them throughout their life,” she said.

She encourages new graduates and alumni to build a reputation of being effective.

“Do a good job of the daily tasks in

front of you. Build a reputation in your chosen career field for having the ability to innovate and bring newness to that field,” she said.

As she looks toward the horizon ahead, she remains focused on serving fellow Americans.

“My focus is on preserving faith, family, freedom, and hope, to open the door of opportunity to every American, so they have the chance to build and achieve their version of the American Dream,” she said.