

Ripon Profile



Name: Lisa A. Murkowski

Hometown: Born in Ketchikan, AK; raised in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Southeast, AK; currently residing in Girdwood, AK.

Occupation: United States Senator from the State of Alaska.

Previous Jobs: Anchorage District Court attorney, 1987-89; Attorney, 1989-98; Alaska House of Representatives, 1998-2002; U.S. Senate, 2002-present.

Individual who inspired me as a child: My earliest inspirations were the teachers in my life, starting with my grandmother who was a second grade teacher in Ketchikan. I have strong memories of all the teachers during my elementary school years. My first grade teacher, Mrs. Buness, made a huge impression on me and my love for learning. I didn't realize it at the time but she was trained in the Montessori method. So we touched, smelled and tasted, engaging not only our minds but all of our senses. It was active and fun learning. Mrs. Buness made education come alive for me. Had I not studied law and served in elected office, I would have followed my dream to teach.

Historical figures I would most like to meet: I've always loved stories about female aviators, such as Amelia Earhart and Beryl Markham, the great British female pilot. They were real aviation pioneers and their daring-do has always appealed to me. I would also love to have met the great explorers of the Arctic: Men such as Admiral Richard Byrd and Roald Amundsen as well as countless others who braved the challenges of Arctic exploration. I am fascinated by pioneers of last frontiers, and Alaska has lured many of them.

Issues facing America that no one is talking about: Youth suicide is an area I have focused on as a member of the Senate Health Committee. Alaska's youth suicide rate is three times higher than the national average. While it's a very serious problem in my state, it's not just an Alaskan issue. It's a national crisis as well – especially in rural America and among our native populations. What's fueling this crisis? Is it a disintegration of the family, a failure to inspire kids in school, the easy availability of alcohol and drugs? I suspect it's a combination of many things. I don't have the answers to this problem; perhaps more mental health professional intervention in our high schools and screening programs are good places to start. I do know that we just can't leave struggling kids to deal with emotional crises alone.

What the GOP must do to reclaim its congressional majority: The Republican Party needs to better reflect the diversity of our nation. We need to improve our outreach to women, Hispanics, African Americans and Native Americans. If people feel that we are the party of only a select constituency, we will remain in the minority. If they recognize that we're the party that will help their small businesses to succeed, that cares about reducing costs for their family, whether for health care or energy or housing, then I think the GOP can regain the majority.