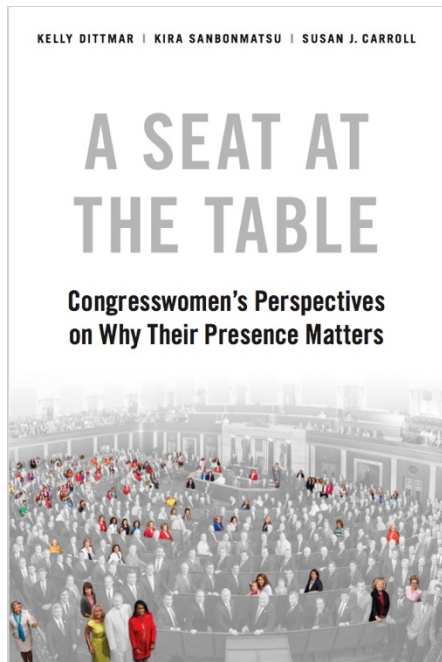


A SEAT AT THE TABLE: CONGRESSWOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON WHY THEIR PRESENCE MATTERS

By Kelly Dittmar, Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Susan J. Carroll



Record numbers of women are running for office in 2018. What difference will it make if they win? In their new book - [*A Seat at the Table: Congresswomen's Perspectives on Why Their Presence Matters*](#) (Oxford University Press), Kelly Dittmar, Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Susan J. Carroll rely on interviews with over three-quarters of women serving in the 114th Congress (2015-17) to detail the myriad ways in which women's representation matters on Capitol Hill. While congresswomen's perspectives, experiences, and influence are neither uniform nor interchangeable, they strongly believe their presence affects congressional culture, priorities, processes, debates, and outcomes. *A Seat at the Table* provides engaging stories and insights from congresswomen, as well as accessible analysis, that will resonate with broad audiences and facilitate timely conversations about the potential effects of increasing women's congressional representation in 2019.

"Women need to be here, and they need to be here because everything impacts us and our families and our communities. And if we're not here, then the issues that need to be talked about the most won't be talked about. They won't be addressed. You know, they'll never get to the table. So we need to be . . . in the room, at the table, feet planted firmly under the table, so that we in fact have the kind of voice that we need to have." - **Representative Alma Adams (D-NC)**

"I believe that women look at issues differently than men do and that's just the way we are. We come at things in a different way, and since 52% of the population is female it behooves us to make sure that we have a voice, a woman's voice in the discussions." - **Representative Diane Black (R-TN)**

"Women's life experiences are different from men's. They're not better. They're not worse. But they are different. It is important for us to have people who have those experiences at the table so we can talk about those and we can respond to the challenges that half of the population in this country face." - **Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)**

"It is really important for women in the country to see that someone who may have shared their experience—whether it is to be a working mom or whatever it happens to be—[has] a voice at the table." - **House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)**

Congresswomen discuss their specific influence on key public policy debates, including passage of the Affordable Care Act, immigration reform, gun control, curbing sexual assault in the military and in higher education, accommodating caregivers in policy and institutions, and criminal justice reform.

On Addressing Sexual Assault in the Military and in Higher Education:

"I think it is easier for a female member to imagine what it's like to be victimized, to be disbelieved, disregarded, and retaliated against. It is something that they can imagine happening easier than many of our male colleagues who can't imagine ever being victimized or disbelieved or disregarded because they've never experienced that." – **Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)**

On Respecting the Service of Women Air Force Service Pilots:

When **[Representative Martha McSally, R-AZ]** heard that the WASP members' rights to have their remains buried at Arlington were being revoked, she described being "infuriated" and getting to work immediately on seeking an administrative or legislative solution. Joking about the importance of having a woman veteran lead this bill, she quipped to a supportive male colleague, *"I get to lead on this because I have ovaries and wings."*

On Adding a Distinct Voice to the Debate over Comprehensive Immigration Reform:

"I would say mine was the only voice in [the Judiciary] Committee that spoke for the importance of family unity [in debates over immigration reform]. And so I brought [that voice] . . . not only as a woman but also as an immigrant. And this is why it is important to have minority representation on all of these committees. Because you have different life experiences, different perspectives, and women certainly bring that to any committee they are on." – **Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI)**

With attention to both shared experiences and diversity among congresswomen – especially that rooted in partisan and racial or ethnic identities, *A Seat at the Table* analyzes how women navigate today's stark partisan divisions, details the ways in which women experience service within a male-dominated institution, and looks at what motivates these women's legislative priorities and behavior.

"I think women tend to be more collaborative, but I want to dispel the notion that somehow we think alike or that we share the same political views; just as the men in the Senate span the ideological spectrum, so do the women. But I do believe the style of the women senators is more collaborative." – **Senator Susan Collins (R- ME)**

"I don't think women come here to be somebody. I think we come here to get things done." – **Representative Anna Eshoo (D-CA)**

The impact of women in office goes beyond policy and process, according to congresswomen. They also pointed to the importance of being at the table to inspire others to revise their perceptions of women's ability to lead.

"If I spark the imagination of one woman who wouldn't have otherwise thought of [herself] as a policymaker, I am hopefully creating a pipeline of other women who will join the ranks of the elected." – **Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL)**

"I think that we have to change the mindset not only of girls in encouraging them to run or consider leadership; we have to change the minds of boys and boys who support girls." - **Representative Susan Brooks (R-IN)**

Regardless of party, women in Congress believe that it would be better if there were more of them.

"I really, truly believe the more women that are in Congress, the better this country will be. I really do believe that."
- **Representative Lois Frankel (D-FL)**

"[W]hen [women] are really part of the discussion and the decision-making, our voices are distinct . . . But we're just not to scale . . . there's just not enough of us, period." - **Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD)**

A Seat at the Table is endorsed by veteran women lawmakers who know intimately what it is like to be a woman in what remains a male-dominated political institution.

"This book's portrayal of women in Congress, powerfully conveyed in their own words, irrefutably demonstrates that the presence of women's voices is essential to a governing democracy. It illustrates how collectively their unique experiences and perspectives are invaluable to the effectiveness of the legislative process. What is also revealed is how women so often foster the collaboration and consensus-building that is essential to solving problems and producing results." - **Olympia Snowe, former U.S. Senator from Maine**

"This book, which reveals personal interviews with three quarters of the women serving in Congress today, will inform and inspire the thousands of women enthusiastically taking up the challenge of running for local, state or federal office. I am certain that the future of our country will be brighter and our democracy more vibrant because of the inspiration provided by the exceptional women highlighted in this book." - **Mary Landrieu, former U.S. Senator from Louisiana**

FOR A REVIEW COPY OF A SEAT AT THE TABLE, CONTACT SETH COTTERMAN (MARKETING MANAGER) AT OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS: seth.cotterman@oup.com.

TO CONTACT OR BOOK THE AUTHORS, CONTACT DANIEL DE SIMONE (COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST) AT THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS (CAWP) AT RUTGERS: ddesimone@eagleton.rutgers.edu