Tom Harkin (D)

Of Cumming — Elected 1984, 3rd term

Biographical Information

Born: Nov. 19, 1939, Cumming, Iowa.
Education: Iowa State U., B.S. 1962; Catholic U., J.D. 1972.
Military Service: Navy, 1962-67; Naval Reserve, 1968-74.
Occupation: Lawyer.
Family: Wife, Ruth Raduenz; two children.
Religion: Roman Catholic.
Political Career: Democratic nominee for U.S. House, 1972; U.S. House, 1975-85; sought Democratic nomination for president, 1992.
Capitol Office: 731 Hart Bldg. 20510; 224-3254.

Committees

Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry (ranking)
Appropriations
Agriculture, Rural Development & Related Agencies; Defense; Foreign Operations; Labor, Health & Human Services & Education (ranking); VA, HUD & Independent Agencies
Labor & Human Resources
Employment & Training; Public Health & Safety
Small Business



In Washington: The first Democrat in state history to win a third Senate term, Harkin gives Iowans a leading voice on agriculture issues with his ascension to the ranking minority post on the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee in the 105th Congress. In addition, he remains as the top Democrat on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education, where he can not only funnel federal dollars to Iowa but also influence policy on children, health care, disabilities and other issues that have been the focus of his Senate career.

The path to success for Harkin, whose 1992 foray into presidential politics ended soon after his favorite-son victory in the Iowa caucuses, has been one of catering to longtime constituencies such as labor, but not without concessions to prevailing political winds. The Iowa populist campaigned for president as an unapologetic New Deal liberal in late 1991 and early 1992, but he has also been known to temper that liberal image at times.

In the 104th Congress, Harkin and Missouri Republican Christopher S. Bond introduced the first bipartisan welfare legislation, which was modeled after Iowa's successful Family Investment Plan. The plan, which requires recipients to sign an actual contract with the state, has increased the number of welfare recipients landing new jobs and lowered the state's costs. Harkin also voted against same-sex marriages, and he offered his support for a limited capital gains tax cut, traditionally a conservative cause, early in 1995.

But Harkin's most notable departure from the liberal ideology that has marked his tenure has come on the balanced-budget constitutional amendment. He backed the amendment in the 104th and 105th Congresses, saying that if the budget could be balanced, prospects would be brighter for funding government programs that he supports, because fewer dollars would be needed to pay interest on the national debt.

Earlier, Harkin had run hot and cold on the balanced-budget amendment. Skewered by conservative groups for opposing it in his first Senate race against GOP Sen. Roger W. Jepsen in 1984, Harkin voted for the amendment in 1986. But after becoming the first Iowa Democrat to be re-elected to the Senate in 1990, he voted against the amendment in 1994. Facing re-election in 1996, he switched positions again.

Harkin is a close ally of President Clinton's. The president appointed Harkin's wife, Ruth Raduenz, as president and chief executive officer of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). Harkin himself had been quick to endorse Clinton's presidential bid in 1992 after his own fourth-place finish in the New Hampshire primary (and a lack of campaign money) forced him to bow out. Harkin worked hard the rest of the year to win votes for Clinton, especially among his labor union allies.

Harkin's ties to Clinton have made him a passionate defender of the administration in its difficult hours. He backed the nomination of Dr. Henry W. Foster Jr. to be surgeon general, and when Republicans prevented a vote on that nomination in June 1995, Harkin warned of the consequences. "We are going down a very bad road because if we continue this, the worm will turn," he said. "There will be a Democratic Senate and a Republican president, and the shoe will be on the other foot."

Still, Harkin has shown a willingness to part ways with Clinton on several occasions, especially when the president's views contrast with Harkin's populism. He opposed the 1996 reauthorization of the nation's farm programs because he feared poorer farmers might suffer under its system of fixed, declining subsidies; although Clinton, too, had misgivings about that approach, he signed the measure. When Clinton agreed early in 1996 to sign a stopgap spending bill that included cuts in education funding, Harkin called the decision a mistake.

Harkin became a thorn in the administration's side in 1996 when Clinton nominated Alan

Greenspan to serve a second four-year term as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board. Quick Senate confirmation was expected, but Harkin delayed a floor vote for weeks because he wanted to debate the nomination in the context of overall Fed policy. He contended that Greenspan's acceptance of slow growth as the price for low inflation had kept businesses from creating new jobs and increasing workers' incomes. Senate leaders ultimately let Harkin raise questions about that policy to break the logjam on the nomination.

Harkin also has questioned the Clinton administration's foreign policy decisions. He criticized its slow response toward restoring democratic rule to Haiti in the 103rd Congress and said of the 1995 offer of $40 billion in U.S.-backed loan guarantees to Mexico when it faced financial collapse: "We shouldn't go at this like the Lone Ranger. Other countries ought to chip in."

Harkin sees himself as a defender of the interests of the common folk and the disadvantaged against the rich and powerful. When Democrats were in the majority, he used his chairmanships of an Appropriations subcommittee and the Labor and Human Resources Subcommittee on Disability Policy to pursue his causes. But after Republicans took Senate control in 1995, he had to react to their agenda more often than not. Early in the 104th, Harkin and Democrat Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut proposed new limitations on the use of the filibuster, an idea they had begun to pursue when in the majority. But Harkin also quickly availed himself of the weapon when Republicans began to push anti-labor proposals.

In one such instance in 1995, Senate Republicans sought to overturn a Clinton directive barring big federal contractors from hiring permanent replacements for strikers. Harkin rallied Democrats to defend the president's directive. Two efforts to end floor debate on the GOP effort failed on party-line votes, and Republicans eventually dropped the "striker replacement" language.

Harkin was a central figure in another labor-related debate as Congress neared adjournment in 1996. He and Democrat Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts brought the Senate to a standstill as they fought to remove language from the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill that they said would make it more difficult for employees of Federal Express Corp. to unionize. Harkin and Kennedy ultimately failed in that effort, but their performance as Horatius at the bridge to slow the machine was widely noted.

An advocate for children since the outset of his congressional career, Harkin in the 104th Congress challenged Republican efforts to narrow the federal education role. Resisting cuts in education spending at every opportunity, he succeeded in helping to get $2.7 billion restored in fiscal 1996 for programs such as Head Start, Goals 2000, school-to-work training, dislocated worker training and counseling, and summer youth jobs. In 1996, Harkin helped win the restoration of $2 billion in proposed cuts in education and health care for the fiscal 1997 budget.

Harkin has been a successful activist for increased funding for breast cancer research; two of his sisters died of breast cancer. In the 102nd Congress, he successfully pushed a measure to expand programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. He also won reauthorization of legislation aimed at protecting the rights of the mentally ill.

Harkin has said that the proudest moment of his years in Congress came in 1990 when President George Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act. The law, passed after years of effort and negotiations, extends broad civil rights protections to an estimated 43 million Americans with mental and physical disabilities. During final consideration, Harkin delivered a portion of his floor speech in sign language; it was addressed, he said, to his brother Frank, who is deaf.

Against the backdrop of a long and stressful 1990 re-election contest, Harkin reoriented his issue agenda in the 101st Congress, reflecting the changing focus of Iowa voters. In the mid-1980s, Harkin's extreme views on the importance of helping farmers were a centerpiece of his persona. But as Iowa's farm economy improved, he assumed a higher profile on a number of social policy issues, and he continued as an outspoken liberal voice on foreign policy — always politically correct in dovish Iowa.

Harkin has long been known for his outspokenness on U.S. foreign policy, especially involving Central America and the human rights records of other countries. When the 102nd Congress convened and turned its attention to the Persian Gulf crisis, Harkin led the liberals' charge. In November 1990, Harkin had joined 53 Democratic House members in a lawsuit seeking to prevent Bush from launching a military attack without Congress' approval.

At Home: Harkin's path to re-election in 1996 was similar to the one he traveled in 1990: He faced a well-funded GOP House incumbent. His 1990 foe had been Rep. Tom Tauke, perhaps the strongest candidate Republicans could have nominated that year except for Gov. Terry E. Branstad; in 1996, Rep. Jim Ross Lightfoot heeded the GOP call.

Lightfoot spoiled Harkin's hopes of cruising to re-election against a lesser-known opponent when he filed to run just three weeks before the March 15 deadline. But he did not spoil Harkin's bid for an unprecedented third term.

Tagged as a "liberal" in 60-second radio ads aired by the National Republican Senatorial Committee and accused by Lightfoot's campaign of having an "out-of-touch voting record," Harkin won by his narrowest margin ever. But his ties to Clinton, whose appearance at one

Iowa fundraiser garnered $200,000, helped Harkin outdistance the GOP challenger by 52 percent to 47 percent.

Harkin had been considered highly vulnerable in 1990, but he pulled off a historic win, becoming the first Iowa Democrat ever to be re-elected to the Senate. Harkin took nothing for granted en route to a second term. He opened his re-election battle early in 1989 by announcing his county-by-county campaign chairmen and stockpiled a sizable campaign fund. That did not scare off Rep. Tauke, who also began early, raising money and seeking to build on his bipartisan base in the 2nd District.

Tauke pecked away at Harkin on a variety of issues, accusing him of franking abuses and of voting for excessive spending. But none of the attacks truly took hold, while Harkin stressed his work on legislation to help people with disabilities. The two men also clashed over abortion — Harkin for abortion rights, Tauke opposed — although voters appeared divided on the issue, possibly making it a political wash. In the end Harkin won by a rather comfortable 9 points.

Harkin was no stranger to hard-fought campaigns; his 1984 race against Republican Sen. Roger W. Jepsen was one of that year's heavyweight bouts. Six years earlier, Jepsen had stunned Iowa Democrats by ousting Sen. Dick Clark. There never was much doubt that Jepsen would be vulnerable in 1984, and Harkin, who had proved his campaign skills by securing a Republican House district, was the logical opponent.

Jepsen's problem was that most of the events by which he had distinguished himself in office reflected badly on him. In 1983, for example, he had cited constitutional immunity to escape paying a traffic ticket while driving to work. Conservative organizations flocked to his defense, financing a barrage of TV and radio ads skewering Harkin for opposing a balanced-budget amendment and favoring higher taxes. Harkin came back with charges that Jepsen was freer with tax dollars than any other recent Iowa senator, dubbing him "Red Ink Roger." Though polls showed a tight race, Harkin took 56 percent.

Republicans saw little cause for worry when Harkin first announced for Congress in 1972 against an entrenched GOP incumbent. But they soon found themselves up against one of the more resourceful Democrats in recent Iowa politics.

Harkin projected his concern for agriculture in rural western Iowa and drew publicity with his gimmick of "work days." Republican Rep. William Scherle defeated him, but by the lowest percentage of his House career. Harkin launched his 1974 bid early, built a stronger organization and raised more money. Scherle made more appearances and tried to distance himself from the unpopular Republican administration. But Harkin won narrowly and quickly secured his hold on the seat.

SENATE ELECTIONS

1996 General

Tom Harkin (D)	634,166	(52%)
Jim Ross Lightfoot (R)	571,807	(47%)

Previous Winning Percentages: **1990** (54%) **1984** (56%) **1982*** (59%) **1980*** (60%) **1978*** (59%) **1976*** (65%) **1974*** (51%)

** House elections*

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

	Receipts	Receipts from PACs		Expenditures
1996				
Harkin (D)	$4,665,182	$1,061,573	(23%)	$5,276,708
Lightfoot (R)	$2,474,871	$553,512	(22%)	$2,439,679

KEY VOTES

1997	
Approve balanced-budget constitutional amendment	Y
Approve chemical weapons treaty	Y
1996	
Approve farm bill	N
Limit punitive damages in product liability cases	N
Exempt small businesses from higher minimum wage	N
Approve welfare overhaul	Y
Bar job discrimination based on sexual orientation	Y
Override veto of ban on "partial birth" abortions	N
1995	
Approve GOP budget with tax and spending cuts	N
Approve constitutional amendment barring flag desecration	N

VOTING STUDIES

	Presidential Support		Party Unity		Conservative Coalition	
Year	**S**	**O**	**S**	**O**	**S**	**O**
1996	85	15	91	9	18	82
1995	90	10	91	9	14	86
1994	90	8	95	3	9	88
1993	92	7	92	6	15	83
1992	18	62	66	3	5	66
1991	19	62	75	3	5	75

INTEREST GROUP RATINGS

Year	ADA	AFL-CIO	CCUS	ACU
1996	80	n/a	38	10
1995	95	92	44	9
1994	100	88	30	0
1993	90	73	27	0
1992	85	91	17	0
1991	100	90	14	0