

Ripon Profile

Name: Kelly Ayotte

Occupation: U.S. Senator, New Hampshire

As a former New Hampshire Attorney General and now U.S. Senator, you've had the opportunity to see our crumbling justice system from multiple perspectives. How do Republicans keep the "tough on crime" mantra while addressing critical funding issues and high recidivism rates? For starters, with over \$17 trillion in debt, we need to get our fiscal house in order. Spending on wasteful or duplicative programs diverts money from more urgent priorities. I've worked at the federal level to address a problem that we are seeing all across the country – the fact that our nation's jails are becoming *de facto* mental health facilities. Having worked as a prosecutor and as state attorney general, I know that there are gaps in both our existing mental health and judicial systems – which is why I'm co-sponsoring the **Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Act**. This bipartisan legislation would help ensure law enforcement has the tools they need to identify and respond to mental health issues. It would also continue support for mental health courts and crisis intervention teams – getting defendants the treatment they need and stemming recidivism.

Some credit you as replacing Sen. Lieberman within the "Three Amigos" as the newcomer to this prominent gathering of Senate foreign policy titans. What have you learned from your short time working with Senators McCain and Graham? No one can replace Joe Lieberman! He was one of my designated mentors when I arrived in the Senate, and I benefitted tremendously from his guidance. Senator Lieberman, Senator McCain and Senator Graham are deeply respected on matters relating to national security and foreign affairs. They bring decades of experience to these issues, and they have tremendous credibility. When it comes to our national security, they understand that we're Americans first, and I've admired each of them for their tireless work to keep our country safe.

Most pundits in 2012 pegged you as a potential running mate for Romney due, in part, to help combat the "war on women" notion perpetuated by Democrats. How would you characterize the Republican Party's understanding of women's issues today? The Republican Party cares about issues that matter to *all* Americans – women and men. Contrary to what the Democrats seem to think, women aren't monolithic voters. Among other issues, we care about jobs and the economy, fiscal responsibility, a strong national security, and school choice. These are issues that are a priority for Republicans, and we're on the right side of these issues.

Recently, the Senate passed your bipartisan bill to address military sexual assaults by a unanimous vote, 97-0. What does this rare, but sweeping support suggest about this issue? It shows that Congress rejects the status quo. We passed unprecedented reforms in December, and the legislation I helped author and pass enhances those reforms to further protect and empower victims by increasing reporting and prosecutions, demanding accountability within the chain of command, and assuring victims have a say during the prosecution process. Even one sexual assault is too many, and we're going to hold military commanders accountable for changing the culture.

And finally, what advice would you give to your potential Senate colleague, Scott Brown, as he begins his first attempt to court voters from the Granite State? The same advice I'd give anyone who runs for office in New Hampshire: there's no substitute for grassroots campaigning. Spend as much time as possible in people's communities, neighborhoods, and living rooms.

