



# Courageous, Dangerous, Christian!

## Meet Cynthia Lummis

*By Beth Foreman, Features Editor*

*Congresswoman  
Cynthia Lummis*

On a typical Saturday, she'll probably toss on her well-worn barn coat, mud boots, and leather gloves to tend her shorthorns on the family ranch in Laramie County, Wyoming. Then the next week, she might be buttoning her navy suit and slipping on a pair of heels before introducing a bill in Congress to protect Veterans' Health Care. For most, these experiences seem to belong to two "dangerous" worlds, the world of ranching and the world of politics.

Yet Congresswoman Cynthia Lummis, elected last fall by the people of Wyoming to serve in the United States House of Representatives, seems pretty comfortable in both worlds.

Born and raised in Wyoming, Cynthia is proud to hail from the Equality State, so-named because it was the first state to grant women the right to vote in 1890. In fact, even as a wild territory back in 1869, Wyoming had granted women the right to vote in all elections. Those strong pioneers blazed the way for thousands even into the twentieth century when they were the first state to elect a female governor in 1924.

Cynthia represents a few firsts of her own. The youngest woman ever elected to the Wyoming Leg-

islature, she is also the first woman in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to serve in the United States Congress.

Since the beginning of this year, she has learned to weave together these two seemingly distinct worlds: Washington, D.C. — with its frenzied pace, honking horns, and oral arguments — and Wyoming, where she retreats every weekend to her family's ranch to spend time with her husband, attend her home church, touch base with the people of Wyoming, and just look at the big sky.

In the political world where her day is filled with committee and subcommittee meetings on everything from trade taxes and omnibus spending to federal deficits and congressional reports, it would seem hard to find room for faith. However, Cynthia finds opportunities to be "winsome in her witness," according to Rev. John Rasmussen, one of Cynthia's former pastors at Trinity Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, who has also served as a military chaplain at the Pentagon. "I have never heard of Cynthia apologizing for her faith. On the other hand she does not openly proselytize. She listens to people and then responds," he said.

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Pastor Rasmussen continued, "On the first week of their arrival in Washington, D.C., Al [Cynthia's husband] asked me about LCMS churches where they might attend worship. Having preached and worshipped at most of the LCMS churches in the area during my assignment at the Pentagon, I was able to provide them with names and locations of churches and some pastors in the area. I asked myself how many other newly elected politicians in Washington would be looking for a church home during this busy and hectic time. Very, very few, I suspected. It spoke about her Christian life, Christian priorities, and commitment."

Cynthia, however, was happy to find many welcoming Christians once she started her work in Congress. "A lot of talk among the members of Congress is about their faith. We have a bipartisan prayer breakfast every Thursday morning, and our Republican caucuses begin with prayer," she shared in a phone interview. "I find myself surrounded by Christian people. I wasn't expecting to find that here, but it is everywhere and I'm very pleased about that."

Certainly, being surrounded by Christians at work is a blessing that helps her face the many challenges in the sometimes rough-and-tumble world of politics. One of her greatest challenges is "keeping on a schedule that allows me to stay balanced between what is going on here in Washington and what is going on in the rest of the world," she said. "Every week, I'm helping to make decisions that may make lives better or may make lives more difficult, and that includes decisions that affect freedoms, among them the freedom of religion." Wrestling complex decisions is perhaps even more "dangerous" than wrestling calves, but Cynthia presses on as one prepared for this work.

Another blessing for Cynthia in D.C. is that she shares an apartment with her daughter, Annaliese. Then on Fridays, she flies home to be with her attorney-husband, Al Wiederspahn. "I get to live with my adult daughter during the week and on the weekends, I'm with my husband. He stays in Wyoming because he wanted to continue his law practice in Cheyenne. But I'm surrounded by family most of the time, which is a great situation for me. I have the best of both worlds."

Careful to count every moment as precious, Cynthia cherishes even her frequent airplane time. "The flight is four hours from Washington to Denver, which gives me plenty of time on the airplane for

reading something inspiring." Her favorite reading, which she shares on her FaceBook™ page, includes biographies of presidents, *John Adams* by David McCullough and *Teddy Roosevelt* by H.W. Brands, as well as a history of the West, *Undaunted Courage* by Steven Ambrose.

When in Wyoming, Cynthia enjoys the change of pace as she spends time with her husband, friends — and her cows. "I love cows! And I still have a small cow herd in addition to our commercial ones on the ranch."



During her recent campaign for public office, Cynthia's daughter created a FaceBook™ page so she could interact with her campaign supporters. On the Info Page, she listed "fishing, skiing, raising short-horns, hiking around on the ranch, and perfecting my flan recipe" as her favorite activities. Her interests included "hanging out with my husband and daughter, rodeo, watching tennis, wide open spaces, and international finance." The photo gallery includes the photograph of Cynthia hand-feeding two of her cows. The caption reads, "In pursuit of raising the perfect shorthorn."

It's not surprising that this Wyoming gal has shorthorns, rodeos, and ranches in her blood

*Cynthia at home with husband, Al, and daughter, Annaliese*



*Rep. Lummis (R-Wyo.) visits with Senators Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) and John Barasso (R-Wyo.) following her swearing in ceremony.*

since her family has been in ranching for years. They've also been part of the Trinity Lutheran Church family for almost as long as Wyoming has been a state, which was in 1890. "The school was first planted and then the church. Many generations of my family have attended school and church at Trinity. When it first opened, the lessons were all in German."

Cynthia's experiences and lessons at the Lutheran day school helped to form her leadership qualities. "I can't imagine being educated any other way," she said about her Lutheran education. But she learned more than reading, writing, and religion at Trinity. "4-H was part of our church life when we were growing up." Indeed, the church was the center of her world. "We went to church at church, school at church, and 4-H at church! The only thing we didn't do at church was our ranch work," she said with a laugh.

Clearly, maintaining a connection to this same church and school is important to Cynthia. She said, "I get to worship at my home church most weekends, which is terrific because then I'm around the people who have shaped me my whole life."

Years ago, she sat in the Lutheran schoolroom at an altitude of about 6,000 feet, surrounded by rolling prairies and cottonwoods. She probably didn't imagine that one day she would be sitting at a much bigger desk in a much bigger city at a much lower altitude (less than 500 feet above sea level), looking at cherry blossoms and making decisions that change lives for countless people.

So where did her political career begin? Cynthia attended the University of Wyoming and studied Animal Science and Biology. "When I was a

senior, I served as an intern in the Wyoming Legislature. That experience inspired me to make my own run for the Wyoming Legislature. From then on, I was hooked!"

And although her career has moved her more than 1,600 miles away from home, reminders of her roots tap her on the shoulder every so often. "Pastor Nolan Obermueller confirmed me years ago. And today, here on my staff in D.C., is Peter Obermueller, his grandson. Pete is a wonderful young man who was working here before I was elected, and now he is on my staff." Obermueller focuses on agricultural policy for Representative Lummis. "It has been a wonderful bridge [having met Peter]. I did not know he existed until I met him in my predecessor's office. It is a small world."

Most of the time, however, the small world must look a lot bigger when she's in the Nation's Capital. When faced with complex issues, Cynthia relies upon her experience as a lawyer.

"As an attorney, I appreciate the constitutional underpinnings of this nation and how it sets us apart from all other countries on earth."

Pastor Rasmussen believes she is "well equipped for the Hill, having served as Wyoming State Treasurer for eight years and legislator in the Wyoming house for years." He continued his praise, "Cynthia is a brilliant person, well informed and articulate. Additionally, she is a skillful attorney. Only time will tell whether she was providentially elected for a 'time such as this.'"

Grounding all of her experience and education is her Christian faith. When tackling the really tough issues, she seeks "guidance from the Bible. I look to apply my core values and seek compassionate responses to these tough issues." Her courage, it seems, does not come from within but from God's Word.

Cynthia often turns to her favorite Bible passage, Psalm 96. "It reminds me of Wyoming, particularly this verse: *Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD.*"

As a public servant, she lives under the microscope of public scrutiny. Sometimes it's difficult, she shared, to "give up my free time and time with my family. That is why I believe public service should be a temporary calling, so that public servants can return to private life. That is why I chose

to abide by term limits when I was Wyoming's State Treasurer."

While she doesn't focus on the personal rewards of this career, she mentioned that one of her greatest joys is in talking to the people she serves, the people of Wyoming. "I hear so many people in Congress say that they get chills when they look at The Capitol," she explained. "Well, I don't get that same chill. For me, it's when a constituent takes me by the arm and tells me, 'I'm praying for you' or 'Please keep doing what you're doing.' It's when I hear my constituents say, 'Just do the right thing for us. We are counting on you.'"

Cynthia, serious about her mission as a servant of the people, still finds time for a bit of fun in Washington, D.C. This past spring she entered another "dangerous" world, at least temporarily, when she was a guest on comedian Stephen Colbert's Comedy Central cable program, *The Colbert Report*. She was interviewed for his "Better Know a District" segment. "It was a good, light-hearted experience. I was instructed by Mr. Colbert before the taping to be serious during the interview and let him make the jokes." Taping for the six-minute segment, by the way, took about ninety minutes. Cynthia said, "Mr. Colbert also explained that the character he plays during the show is a 'bit of an idiot who does not wish to be disabused of that fact, so let me be the comedian and you be the straight person.'" Show business ... another "dangerous" world that Cynthia faced with courage and a quiet chuckle.

As a real cowgirl, one of her most memorable meetings was with a famous cowboy couple. Years ago, Cynthia was crowned Miss Frontier for Cheyenne Frontier Days, the world's largest outdoor rodeo, known as the "Daddy of 'em All" to rodeo cowboys. "The honor of being Miss Frontier was extended to families for years of volunteerism spent making Cheyenne Frontier Days the great community event that it is. The coronation ball provided me with the opportunity to have dinner with Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. That is a moment that I will never forget."

Unforgettable moments are often much simpler for Cynthia. Recently she returned to Trinity Lutheran School, Cheyenne, and visited with students and teachers. According to the principal, Christian J. Boehlke, she spoke to the students, "answering their questions about legislation, a typi-



cal day as a representative, and federal funding for various programs." He added, "Representative Lummis, an alumnus, shared how God has blessed her and encouraged the students to use their abilities to the glory of God."

*Cynthia Lummis visits with students and teachers at Trinity Lutheran School, Cheyenne.*

Pastor Rasmussen added that many were honored by her visit. "One teacher was truly excited and told me how Rep. Lummis closed with a prayer, praying for students, teachers, and pastors. She concluded in Jesus' name. The teacher was so impressed that her representative in Washington, D.C., manifested a Christian concern through prayer for those at Trinity," he said. "Cynthia's schedule is busy yet she finds time for God's children."

Publically sharing one's faith — especially for those whose words and actions are closely followed by the media — can be "dangerous."

"When God's people take a stand, in this case of running for public office, half of the people will love you, the other half will not. It goes with the political turf. You are under the personal and social microscope of those you represent. People often distort what you say. This takes a tremendous amount of courage," continued Pastor Rasmussen. "Rep. Lummis can separate the wheat from the political chaff."

Clearly, those who know Cynthia Lummis recognize her strength and her character to face "dangerous" territory. Whether she's on the plains of Wyoming or in the hallways of the United States Capitol, she is a courageous woman, a courageous Christian.