

In a House Race in N.H., a Famous Spouse, and a Traumatic Pregnancy

Maggie Tamposi Goodlander, the wife of the national security adviser, is navigating a personal landscape with little precedent in her run for Congress in New Hampshire.



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By Lisa Lerer

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Maggie Tamposi Goodlander gave birth to her stillborn son in a hotel bathtub on Easter.

Her fetus had been diagnosed with a fatal condition and had died in her womb. Doctors recommended a two-day procedure to remove him, with an overnight stay at a hotel near the hospital. If she went into labor, they feared, she could hemorrhage.

But getting an appointment took weeks. The procedure that Ms. Goodlander needed is also commonly used for abortions later in pregnancy. Doctors across the northeast were flooded with patients traveling north from states where

abortion had been banned after the fall of *Roe v. Wade*.

Her surgery came just a day too late: Ms. Goodlander, 37, delivered the baby in 2023 at a hotel near the hospital, relying on her experience taking a hypnobirthing course on YouTube. The harrowing experience, she said, exposed her in a deeply personal way to the new reality of a post-*Roe* America and inspired her politically, helping fuel a desire to run for a House seat in her native New Hampshire to help fight for abortion rights.

But there was another remarkable element to her experience. The national security adviser to the president, Jake Sullivan, was there, too — in his unofficial capacity, as her husband.

As she enters the race for New Hampshire's second district, Ms. Goodlander comes armed with a powerful story, an impeccable résumé and deep connections in Washington and New Hampshire. Yet as she campaigns across western New Hampshire, she will have to navigate a personal landscape with little precedent.

There are only a handful of examples of the spouse of a high-ranking official running for federal office, and none when that official has been at the center of one of the most divisive issues in global and domestic politics — the war in Gaza.

Ms. Goodlander, who is a decade younger than her husband, says the couple is used to navigating dueling professional obligations. The two met at a security conference in Munich during the Obama administration, when she was working for then-Senator Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut and he was working for former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the State Department.

More than a dozen years later, they are one of the most well-connected Democratic couples in government. While Mr. Sullivan served as a foreign policy adviser in two administrations, Ms. Goodlander worked as a White House adviser, a deputy assistant attorney general at the Justice Department, a foreign policy adviser in the Senate and an intelligence officer in the Navy Reserve.

Former President Bill Clinton and Mrs. Clinton attended their 2015 wedding in New Haven, Conn., where Mrs. Clinton delivered a reading. (Mrs. Clinton fit the appearance in between East Coast fund-raisers for her presidential campaign.) Mr. Sullivan's sister, brother and sister-in-law all work for the Biden administration.

More recently, Ms. Goodlander talked about running for office with several prominent Democratic lawmakers and with former President Barack Obama. Some of those private discussions were initiated by Mr. Sullivan, who asked the officials if they would be willing to offer advice to his wife, according to three people familiar with the conversations.

Those kinds of interactions are legal, experts said, as long as they are happening in Mr. Sullivan's personal capacity, to avoid violating the Hatch Act, which prohibits federal employees from engaging in political activities while they are working.

"Nothing changes because his spouse happens to be running for federal office," said Donald Sherman, the chief counsel for Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a non-profit watchdog group. "His wife running for office is the kind of thing that makes the news but doesn't change the legal obligations."

Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser, and his wife, Ms. Goodlander, have become one of the most well-connected Democratic couples in government. Michael A. McCoy for The New York Times

Ms. Goodlander says her campaign will operate with the “highest ethical standards consistent with the law.” The couple met repeatedly with lawyers at the White House and the National Security Council to get detailed guidance on the Hatch Act before Ms. Goodlander began her campaign. She flatly rejected the suggestion that a donor to her campaign could be seeking to influence her husband — and the foreign policy of the administration.

“I’ve had my own career and I will continue to have my own career,” she said. “I can’t be bought and neither can Jake.”

But the optics of those lines can be tricky: Mr. Sullivan can, for example, attend a fund-raiser for his wife but is barred from asking for donations. He can wear a T-shirt supporting her campaign but not at the White House, his workplace. He can put a bumper sticker on his car — as long as the vehicle isn’t used for his official duties.

Mr. Sullivan is also immersed in an issue that has inflamed the Democratic base and taken over the campaign trail, as candidates across the country find themselves disrupted by protesters objecting to the administration’s support for Israel. When asked, Ms. Goodlander declined to offer any criticism of the Biden administration’s response to the war, saying she was “really proud” of her husband.

So far, Mr. Sullivan has remained a nearly invisible presence in Ms. Goodlander's nascent campaign, only briefly appearing, smiling broadly at his wife, in a still shot included in her kickoff video. Last weekend, as Mr. Sullivan flew to the Middle East for talks with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, Ms. Goodlander mingled with voters at the St. Philip Greek Food Festival in Nashua and addressed an awards dinner hosted by the New Hampshire Young Democrats.

But their life in Washington has raised other questions, as well. In 2018, the couple bought a house in Portsmouth, N.H., a scenic seaside town located in the state's other congressional district, and Ms. Goodlander began teaching law at the University of New Hampshire and Dartmouth College. After Mr. Biden won the White House, she returned to Washington to work in the Justice Department as a top official in the antitrust division.

Shortly before announcing her bid earlier this month, Ms. Goodlander rented a house in Nashua, N.H., the biggest city in the district she hopes to represent in Congress and where she was raised. Voting records show that she last cast a ballot in the district in 2008, when she was an undergraduate at Yale University and voted absentee.

Ms. Goodlander dismisses concerns about her residency by citing her deep family roots in the state. Her grandfather Samuel A. Tamposi was the state's largest commercial real estate developer, a limited partner in the Boston Red Sox and a major Republican donor. Her mother, Betty Tamposi, served as a Republican legislator in the New Hampshire statehouse and ran for the same seat that Ms. Goodlander is trying to win. During that race, in 1988, Ms. Tamposi was criticized by Senator Gordon Humphrey, a New Hampshire Republican, for placing "political ambition ahead of the welfare of an infant," a comment that referenced a young Ms. Goodlander.

“From my living room you can see the hospital where I was born and the shoe factory where my great-grandfather worked,” Ms. Goodlander said. “My family’s been here for over a hundred years, so this has always been our home. I left home to serve my country and I’m coming back home to do the same.”

But Ms. Goodlander will face two Democratic opponents in the Sept. 10 primary with far more recent involvement in New Hampshire politics — both of whom are running, like she is, with a heavy focus on fighting for abortion rights. One of them, State Senator Becky Whitley, a two-term legislator, was born in the district and returned to the state after law school to work as an environmental and disability rights lawyer.

Her other opponent, Colin Van Ostern, is a well-established political operator in the state who served two terms on the New Hampshire Executive Council and mounted a losing bid for governor in 2016. A California native, Mr. Van Ostern moved to New Hampshire in 2001 to work on Senator Jeanne Shaheen’s first Senate campaign and stayed. He’s been endorsed by Representative Ann McLane Kuster, the retiring Democratic lawmaker who holds the seat, as well as more than 300 other local officials and activists.

“Let me say it this way,” Mr. Van Ostern said, when asked about Ms. Goodlander’s residency. “I would not trade my grass roots support and a track record of real results for the people of this district over 20 years for anything. Not for any amount of money, for any amount of powerful connections.”

Some longtime New Hampshire political organizers doubt that Ms. Goodlander’s time in Washington will be a major issue for voters in the state.

“Her grandfather just about built Nashua — even though he’s a Republican, he did a lot of good things for New Hampshire,” said William Shaheen, a longtime New Hampshire Democratic activist who is married to the state’s senior senator, Ms. Shaheen. “She’s a New Hampshire girl.”

Lisa Lerer is a national political reporter for The Times, based in New York. She has covered American politics for nearly two decades. [More about Lisa Lerer](#)