

Giffords smiling in first photos release

BY CECILIA KANG / The Washington Post

Two photos released Sunday show a smiling Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., with much shorter and darker hair and few signs of the injuries she suffered when a bullet pierced her skull five months ago.

The images, the clearest yet of the lawmaker targeted in a deadly Arizona shooting rampage, were taken May 17 by a professional photographer at her Houston rehabilitation facility.

The photos were released on Giffords' Facebook page and were not altered or edited, according to her staff.

They "show Gabby has traveled a remarkable distance since Jan. 8," the day a gunman killed six, shot Giffords in the head and wounded a dozen others during a meet-and-greet with constituents in suburban Tucson, Ariz., spokesman C.J. Karamargin said.

Giffords' aides and family have closely guarded the congresswoman's appearance and news of her recovery. Developments mainly have been released by doctors who have performed surgeries to heal brain swelling and other damage caused by her gunshot wound.

Giffords, to be released as soon as this month from her rehabilitation center, hoped to dampen paparazzi interest in her condition and appear-



P. K. WEIS

In a May 17 photo posted to Rep. Gabrielle Giffords' Facebook page on Sunday, she appears with her mother, Gloria Giffords.

ance, Karamargin said. Rumors surfaced in April that a \$200,000 bounty was out for photos of Giffords in recovery.

The photos were taken one day after Giffords traveled to Florida to see her husband, astronaut Mark Kelly, launch into space on the shuttle Endeavour. She was "smiling and laughing," according to P.K. Weis, a former photojournalist asked to take the photos, adding that "she seemed to enjoy the experience."

"This was Mark and Gabby's decision," Karamargin said. "There is intense interest in the congresswoman's appearance and on the threshold of her going to outpatient treatment, we thought this was a good way to satisfy public curiosity."

The photos show signs of the bullet that pierced through the left side of Giffords' brain. One eye appears smaller than the other, her eyebrows are slightly offset and there is a slight depression near her left eye.

A portion of her skull was removed after the shooting to ease pressure on her brain. A plastic replacement was put into place in May.

Questions still loom over her cognitive abilities, speech and political future. She has worked in therapy to recover her strength and ability to speak and walk. "We know this is going to be more of a marathon than a sprint, but her release into outpatient care will be another sign of progress," Karamargin said.

He added the congresswoman was injured while on the job and has no plans to leave her position before her term expires in January 2013.

Giffords friend Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fla., said Sunday on "Meet the Press" that the two lawmakers spoke last week and had a "wonderful conversation," with Giffords speaking in full sentences.