

military, a time when we remember all those who sacrificed on our behalf, and a time when we recognize the men and women in uniform currently serving to keep our country safer.

Through the years, one of my greatest experiences has been the opportunity I have had to meet with distinguished Kentucky veterans as they visit Washington through the Honor Flight Program. I know many of our colleagues do the same thing when veterans from their States come to town.

Today I ask our colleagues to join me in remembering all those who served and sacrificed so much and in thanking our men and women in uniform who are stationed around the world this holiday season.

TRIBUTE TO KELLY AYOTTE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, "God gave us two ears so we would listen more than talk."

It is a simple phrase that many of us have likely heard before, but to Senator KELLY AYOTTE, it is the best piece of advice she says she ever received, and it is a proverb she has lived by during her time in the Senate. In fact, it is how she got her start here in the first place.

As New Hampshire's first female attorney general, KELLY listened to the concerns of those around her. She heard their concerns about the direction our country was going, about the numerous security threats facing our Nation, and about out-of-control spending. She could have just sat on the sidelines as these problems escalated—it certainly would have been the easier choice—but she chose to jump in the game and work to solve them instead. From day one, Senator AYOTTE rolled up her sleeves and got to work. As the most prominent New Hampshire newspaper put it, she has never been a "freshman back-bencher," she has been a dynamo from the start.

I can't say I was surprised. I still remember the first time I heard about KELLY. It was from our former colleague Judd Gregg, who told me about this rising star in New Hampshire. Boy, was he right. It didn't take long for everyone to reach a similar conclusion.

KELLY is tough, she is a problem solver, and she is a fighter. Senator AYOTTE doesn't view the challenges of this job as obstacles either. She prefers to call them opportunities. She says: "It's how you react to those bends in the road that will make the biggest difference in your life." During her 6 years here, she has clearly made a difference in the lives of a lot of others as well.

Senator AYOTTE has helped make a difference as a champion for jobs and as a champion for the economy. As someone who has helped start a small business, she knows firsthand how regulations can stifle growth. She fought to cut through the redtape and the burdensome rules. She cosponsored a law to help small businesses expand and re-

finance, and she worked to strengthen manufacturing and support job training.

Senator AYOTTE has helped make a difference as a leader on combating opioid abuse. As a former prosecutor who has been among the loudest voices drawing attention to this horrible epidemic, she knows how devastating it has been in her State and across the country. She worked with first responders and families to figure out how to address this heartbreaking challenge. She sponsored and helped pass comprehensive legislation that will help us tackle it. Now, in no small part because of her efforts, we will pass critical funding this very week that will help our communities begin to heal.

Like New Hampshire, my home State of Kentucky has been among the hardest hit by this epidemic. It has been a privilege working with my friend to help do something about it.

Senator AYOTTE has helped make a difference as an expert on national security issues too. This military spouse didn't need someone to tell her what it means to serve nor what it means for veterans and their families. She mastered the issue almost overnight. She fought for language in the VA reform legislation to expand choice when it comes to veterans' health care. She helped prevent dangerous Guantanamo terrorists from being moved to U.S. soil, and she has long spoken out about the threat posed by Iran. She just voted to extend some critical sanctions against the regime last week, and Senator AYOTTE has helped lead efforts to counter its ballistic missile program for years.

It is clear she has been a leader on national security issues right from the start. I was proud to have Senator AYOTTE join me and other colleagues on a congressional delegation I led to the Middle East not long after she took office. It was evident then what a difference she would make on these important matters. She has regularly joined in efforts with two other leading voices in our conference on defense, too, Senators MCCAIN and GRAHAM. Together, they are the "Three Amigos" or, as our former colleague Joe Lieberman might point out, we should really call them the "Three Amigos 2.0."

Either way, here is what is clear. It is an equal partnership, one of mutual respect and trust, one that has strengthened our conference and defense policy, and one that I am sure Senators MCCAIN and GRAHAM would tell you has enriched both their Senate work and their lives. I am sure many other colleagues feel exactly the same way.

Senator AYOTTE set out to make an impact. She clearly made one on her State, her country, for her constituents, and her colleagues, but I know Senator AYOTTE would tell you the most cherished moments of her life aren't those spent in classified briefings or on congressional delegations, they are the ones spent with her fam-

ily—with her husband Joe and their two children, 9-year-old Jake and 12-year-old Kate. They have always been her biggest fans. They are a constant source of comfort and support. Sometimes they like to jump in on the action themselves.

In fact, Kate recently made a cameo—alongside her mother—in an ad featuring the two shooting hoops and practicing layups. From what I hear, Kate may even have her sights on a future in politics. She once advised her mom not to run for President.

Senator AYOTTE was taken aback. She said she wasn't planning on it but wondered why she would ask in the first place. Well, Kate replied: "Because I want to be the first woman President."

I guess it is true what they say, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. It is not surprising when you consider the example KELLY AYOTTE has set, not just for Kate but for so many others as well. If anyone can do it all, it is KELLY AYOTTE. From sports practices and Lego competitions to 5Ks and trips to the largest lake in New Hampshire, the time with her kids is what truly brings KELLY joy.

As all of you know, this job can make you appreciate the little things even more. It is why you will never hear her complain about waiting in the pickup line at school. It is why she enjoys spending her weekend grocery shopping at the Market Basket, probably picking up the ingredients for Grape-Nuts pudding—whatever that is. Apparently, it is one of KELLY's favorites. I will just take her word for that.

I wish to acknowledge what a privilege it has been getting to know Senator AYOTTE and working with her over the past few years. Her impact has been immeasurable, her friendship indisputable. I know she has made her family proud as well.

I want to conclude with a mantra that KELLY and Joe rely upon when facing a challenge: "Brush the dirt off and get back in the game." It is a good reminder for each of us. I feel confident in saying that Senator AYOTTE will be back in the game, looking out for her State and making our country stronger and safer no matter where her next journey leads.

TRIBUTES TO DEPARTING SENATORS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, finally, as each session of Congress comes to a close, both leaders traditionally pay tribute to the retiring Members of their own parties. This year is a bit different, of course, with the retirement of the Democratic leader. So in addition to what I will be saying about him tomorrow, I figured I might shake things up just a bit more, just this one time. I figured I would tell my colleagues about two colleagues from across the aisle who have made their own mark on this Chamber for many years.

BARBARA MIKULSKI

The first colleague I wish to speak about is from Maryland. Some call her Senator MIKULSKI, some call her Senator BARB, but everyone knows this: She is tough. It explains how she got here in the first place.

You see, BARBARA MIKULSKI had a lot of dreams growing up. She wanted to be a scientist. She wanted to be a nun. She even wanted to be an astronaut. And if not for a “C” in chemistry, a vow of obedience, and the thought of wearing a flight suit—or so we have heard—she probably could have done all of those things. But Senator BARB chose a different path—or rather all of them at once. You see, you don’t have to work in a lab to champion science research; you can serve as the lead Democratic appropriator on the Commerce-Justice-Science Subcommittee. You don’t have to put on a habit to look out for others; you can serve as dean of the Senate women and cultivate mentorship among your colleagues. And you certainly don’t have to blast into space to blaze a trail—something this longest serving female Member of Congress knows very well. It wasn’t an easy road getting here. It wasn’t an easy road when she got here. No Democratic woman had ever been elected to the Senate in her own right before BARBARA MIKULSKI. But, as she said on the stump, “I might be short, but I won’t be overlooked.” And, boy, she hasn’t been. I doubt she ever will be. Maybe it has something to do with the mantra she follows: Do or do not—there is no try. No surprise that this “Star Wars” fan is taking advice from Master Yoda.

She has learned a lot from others, too, like her great-grandmother, who emigrated from Poland with hope and little else—hope that her family might one day experience this country’s many freedoms and opportunities. I know she would be proud of her great-granddaughter today, proud of this crime novelist, this crab cake gourmet, this senior Senator from Maryland.

So here is what we have come to know about Senator MIKULSKI: Her word is her bond, she is a passionate advocate for the causes she supports, and good luck stopping her once she puts her mind to something.

BARBARA BOXER

You could say the same thing about another BARBARA I know too. Senator BOXER, like her colleague from Maryland, is hardly the tallest Member around here, but she is not in the habit of getting overlooked either. The Boxer box helps with that, of course. It is what she stands on at press conferences to give her just a little more height. And, yes, if that sounds familiar, that is because it is that box which once served as inspiration for an episode of HBO’s “Veep.”

It is a good thing our colleague has a sense of humor. She understands how far that can go around here. She has often relied on it through her years in the Senate, in fact, including when she

announced her retirement via rhyme: “More than 20 years in a job I love,” she wrote, “thanks to California and the Lord above.” You get the picture. It goes on, but here is the key line: “As long as there are issues and challenges and strife, I will never retire, ‘cause that’s the meaning of my life.” That sure sounds like the Senator BOXER I know.

It is not always easy to find common ground around here. It takes hard work. It takes negotiation. It often takes those intangibles too—like comic relief. So enter Senator INHOFE. I am really going to miss the JIM and BARBARA show when it comes to an end next year, especially after such a storied run over at EPW. One day, she is the boss; the next day, it is he. They are the best of pals; they are the fiercest of rivals. They work together on everything; they agree on almost nothing. It sounds like the premise for some buddy comedy from the 1980s, but here is what it really is: a political masterstroke.

This unlikelyst of partnerships led this year to the first significant environmental reform law in decades. It also led this year to Senate passage of a waterways infrastructure bill that will support important projects across our country. And while some may refer to BOXER and INHOFE as the “oddest of Senate odd couples,” here is what I would call them: pretty smart.

I remember Senator INHOFE always telling me how much he enjoyed working with Senator BOXER and how there were things they could actually agree on, so I made a note of it and kept an eye out for an opportunity of my own. It finally happened in this very Congress. Senator BOXER and Senator INHOFE and I worked together to pass the longest term highway transportation and infrastructure bill in nearly two decades. This isn’t something the critics thought could be done. We each harbored our own doubts. Yet, a bill that repeatedly threatened to come apart actually never did. As Senator BOXER put it, it was “the impossible dream.” It succeeded because we worked in good faith, because we came together, and because we focused on the areas where we did agree and not just the ones where we didn’t.

That is what happens around here when the Senate is working the way it should. We see colleagues from opposite sides working through political differences and coming together on solutions for the American people. Perhaps that is one reason why nearly a quarter of a century later, Senator BOXER says she is leaving the Senate with a full heart. I know she is leaving with the respect of many of her colleagues, too, including some she might not have expected when she first came.

Let me finish with some advice BARBARA MIKULSKI gave to young BARBARA BOXER as she contemplated her first Senate run. “If you run,” Senator MIKULSKI said, “it will be the toughest thing you will ever do,” but, she added,

it will also be “the best thing you will ever do.” I think this is something we can all relate to regardless of which party we belong to and regardless of which State we come from. At the end of the day, we all came here to accomplish things for the people we represent, even if we have different ideas on how to do them.

So, thankfully, there should be no disagreement over this next task. I ask all Senators to join me in recognizing our colleagues for their service and to join me in wishing them good luck as they begin the next chapters of their lives.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. COLLINS). The Democratic leader is recognized.

TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Mr. REID. Madam President, I apologize to Senator BOXER and Senator MIKULSKI. They are going to give their final speeches, but I would like to have this opportunity to speak a few words about President Obama. Of course I will be here for their full speeches.

It is hard to imagine today, but it wasn’t that long ago that Barack Obama was a little-known Illinois legislator with a very unusual name. I still remember the first time I heard that name. I was in the House gym, where Members congregated, and one of the people I shared the room with was Abner Mikva, a longtime Illinois Congressman, an appellate court judge, and President Clinton’s chief legal officer.

I had known that Republican Senator Peter Fitzgerald decided not to run for reelection after one term. Judge Mikva turned to me and said he knew the perfect person to fill that open seat.

I said: Who could that be?

He said: Barack Obama.

I said: What?

He said: Barack Obama.

I said: Who? What kind of a name is that?

He said: He is one of the most talented people I have ever met in all of my years.

That said a lot to me, even though at that time I smiled and left the room.

It didn’t take long, though, before I understood what Abner Mikva said to me. Barack Obama won that election in the Senate. He came from nowhere, a man with an unusual name, but once he was here, it was obvious he was the real deal. His ability to communicate was, and is, stunning. I can remember one of the first floor speeches he gave here in the Senate on George Bush’s policy regarding the Middle East war. It was eloquent, thoughtful, powerful. I was so impressed that following his speech—there had been a quorum call—his seat was way back there, and I