

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 unlikeliest 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.” And 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

walked up to him and I said—he was sitting, I was standing looking over him, and I said: Senator, that was really terrific. That was really good.

I will never forget his response. Without hesitation, without any braggadocio, no conceit, but with humility, he looked up to me and said: I have a gift.

It wasn't a boast; it was a fact. I have never met anyone with the ability to communicate as well as Barack Obama. Whether it is in his writing, speaking to huge crowds of tens of thousands of people or small crowds, or someone on a one-on-one basis, he is without equal when it comes to communicating.

His reputation was well known even before he came to the Senate. He had written a book—a bestseller called "Dreams from My Father"—a decade before arriving here in the Senate. Like his 2006 book—also a bestseller—called "The Audacity of Hope," this book was full of lyrical and insightful writing.

In "Dreams from My Father," he outlined the remarkable story of his life we have all come to know. Born in Kenya in faraway Africa was his father. His mother was from Kansas. He was raised by his grandparents in Hawaii. His mother and grandparents set positive examples for him. They pushed him to always do better, to be the man he was born to be. That upbringing would serve him well.

Barack Obama went to some of the most elite schools in the world. He was an undergraduate at Columbia, where, of course, he was an honor student, then Harvard Law School. He graduated with distinction. He made history as the first African American to be elected president of the Harvard Law Review. Just to be a member of the Harvard Law Review—having gone to law school myself—is significant, but he was the No. 1 guy in that very prestigious law school. Even then, his reputation for bringing people together and his gift of communication were renowned.

He continued to excel after law school. He became a professor of constitutional law at one of America's great law schools. He became a community organizer, as he has spoken about a lot. He became an Illinois State senator before giving one of the most dramatic convention speeches in American history at the 2004 Democratic Convention in Boston.

Throughout it all, his ability to communicate and connect with people fueled his ascendancy. Those skills made Barack Obama a terrific Senator, and they have greatly benefited our country over the past 8 years.

In just a few weeks, Barack Obama will finish his term as the 44th President of our great country. He will be leaving office. I don't know if I am leaving with him or if he is leaving with me. I guess I leave a few days before he does, but we are leaving together. I cannot think of a better per-

son with whom to leave public service than Barack Obama. For 8 years I was his point man, and it has been an honor and an effort of pleasure.

What this man accomplished, despite unprecedented obstruction from the Republicans, is remarkable. History will remember President Barack Obama's many accomplishments. I don't want to get the Presiding Officer in trouble, but it was because of her and two other Republican Senators that his first congressional session was remarkably historic. We wanted to do more, but this good woman presiding over the Senate today said: Enough is enough. We had to retract some of the things we wanted to do. It was hard, but I do say this: It would not have happened but for the Presiding Officer.

President Obama saved the country from economic collapse, ushering in a new era of growth. Since 2010, the economic recovery has added more than 16 million private sector jobs. Median household incomes have risen significantly. The unemployment rate is now 4.6 percent. In some States, like the State of Nevada, it is more than 14 percent. President Obama brought the American auto and manufacturing industries back from the brink of collapse with unique programs—Cash for Clunkers—and more than 800,000 new manufacturing jobs since 2010. The auto industry has added almost 700,000 jobs since 2009. Domestic production of automobiles doubled from below 6 million units per year to 12 million per year in 2015.

President Obama brought health care to tens of millions of Americans through the Affordable Care Act. Every day, we learn how important this bill has been. We heard from the very conservative American Hospital Association today that doing away with ObamaCare would bankrupt the hospital industry. We would lose over the next few years almost \$200 billion. Through the Affordable Care Act, 21 million more Americans now have affordable health care. The uninsured rate is at an all-time low, and 92 percent of Americans now have coverage. Insurance companies cannot deny coverage and charge more to cover people with preexisting conditions.

How many of us have gone out to our home States and had people with tears in their eyes say: You know, Debbie has been sick since she was a little girl with diabetes, and now, for the first time in her life, she can have health insurance.

Insurance companies can't discriminate anymore against anyone because of their gender. All women were discriminated against before. Every American with insurance has access to preventive care without cost sharing. That means no copays for immunizations, cancer screenings, contraceptive coverage for women, diabetes screenings, or blood pressure and cholesterol tests.

President Obama held Wall Street accountable. He signed into law the most

comprehensive Wall Street and financial reform legislation since the Great Depression. His administration established a new watchdog to help protect consumers from unfair financial practices. He signed legislation into law that protects homeowners from mortgage fraud.

President Obama took more action to protect our planet from a changing climate, including the historic Paris Agreement.

I met yesterday with Native Alaskans. It was scary to talk to a Native Alaskan woman. In her town of 800, people are having trouble getting in and out of the town. She told me the animals are confused because the seasons are changing.

The caribou have traveled for 20,000 years, we believe, 3,000 miles to migrate every year. They walk in single file, not in large herds jammed together. She said they are having such difficulty. They used to be able to walk over the ice. They can't. There is no ice. They have to swim.

President Obama made the largest investment ever in renewable energy. He tripled wind power and increased solar power by 30 times, creating more than 200,000 jobs in solar alone, with hundreds of thousands more jobs in the next few years.

President Obama protected more than 260 million acres of public lands and waters. That includes more than 700,000 acres in Nevada with one order that he signed called the Basin and Range National Monument, a place where John Muir came looking around for special places in America. He camped in hills in the Basin and Range. Hopefully, some day every Senator can go to this magnificent place in the desert. It has taken 40 years to build. One man has done it, a famous artist by the name of Michael Heizer. It is called the City. It is stunning. When I talk about 40 years, it wasn't work done on weekends. It was days, weekends, overtime, and large contingencies of people he directed. This magnificent thing in the middle of the desert is now protected forever.

President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama have made our Nation's children a top priority. In 2010, President Obama signed a bill into law to fight child hunger and improve school meals to ensure children receive the nutrition they need to have healthy, successful futures.

President Obama made strides on education. Our Nation's high school graduation rate is the highest in the history of our country. He reformed student loan programs, increased Pell grants, made student loan repayment more affordable, and expanded loan forgiveness for graduates who enter public service professions.

President Obama granted deferred action to immigrant youth who would have qualified under the DREAM Act, bringing nearly 800,000 young people out of the shadows.

President Obama made our country more inclusive. He signed the repeal of

don't ask, don't tell. He signed Executive orders protecting LGBT workers. Americans are now free to marry the person they love, regardless of their gender.

As Commander in Chief, President Obama brought bin Laden to justice.

These are just a few aspects of President Obama's storied legacy, and it is still growing—what a record. It is a legacy of which he should be satisfied. America is better because of this good man being 8 years in the White House.

I am even more impressed by who he is as a person than who he is as President. He is a man of integrity and honesty. I have learned so much from him. I have never heard Barack Obama denigrate anyone, ever. There have been times he could have. Perhaps, I thought a negative word should have been said and I suggested that to him, but he would never take it. No, he wouldn't do that. That is Barack Obama.

Above all, I admire the attention he has given his family. He may be President of the United States, but nothing gets in the way of his family. He is a terrific husband to Michelle and an outstanding father to Sasha and Malia. He arrives home for dinner with his family virtually every night he is in Washington. He goes to their plays and games. President or not, he is a husband and a father.

His devotion extends to his staff as well, and he has had a terrific staff working for him. I can't mention all of them, but I will mention his present Chief of Staff, Denis McDonough. He and I have a very close relationship. Close relationships come with a lot of difficulty sometimes. It has been tough, but we tried to work through it together.

Pete Rouse is one of the nicest people I have ever known. He also worked with the President very closely. He was his chief of staff as Senator, and, of course, a chief adviser when he was in the White House.

Rahm Emanuel, now the leader of Chicago, IL, was former Chief of Staff, and is currently mayor of Chicago. He is a man known for his bluntness and his productivity as a Member of Congress and as Chief of Staff.

Alyssa Mastromonaco was former Deputy Chief of Staff and I hope that I had something to do with the romance that wound up with her marrying my chief of staff, David Krone.

These are just a few of the incredible people I have had the pleasure of working with. They are all wonderful.

Then there is President Obama's Cabinet—a Cabinet of quality. That includes my friend, Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar, a wonderful man and a terrific public servant, a man of substance like no other ever known.

After 8 years leading the country, President Obama is leaving office on a high point. When he first took office, our country was in an economic free fall and hemorrhaging jobs. Now the country is experiencing the longest

streak of private sector job growth ever. We have the lowest unemployment rate in nearly a decade.

After 8 years of President Obama, we are now as a country on a sustainable path to fight climate change and grow renewable energy sources. We are more respected around the world. We reached international agreements to curb climate change, stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and we are on the path to normalizing relations with our neighbor Cuba.

Our country has made significant strides in nearly every way. There is no doubt that the United States is better now than we were 8 years ago, and we have Barack Obama to thank for that.

Thank you, President Obama, for being the person you are.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

TSUNAMI WARNING, EDUCATION, AND RESEARCH ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany H.R. 34, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany H.R. 34, an act to authorize and strengthen the tsunami detection, forecast, warning, research, and mitigation program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill.

McConnell motion to concur in the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill, with McConnell amendment No. 5117, to change the enactment date.

McConnell amendment No. 5118 (to amendment No. 5117), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

FAREWELL TO THE SENATE

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, this is a moment for me that, I think it is fair to say, I will never ever forget.

I am so honored. I am so honored to have members of my family here, staff from past and present from both my personal office and committee, extraordinary colleagues whom I adore and love, whom I worked with, fought with and debated. I am so honored that Senator MCCONNELL and Senator REID have said really nice things about me.

I think, in Senator REID's case, we go back so long, and I will talk a little bit more about that. In Senator MCCONNELL's case, we didn't talk for a long time, and then we did get together and we did some great work together. But I think he was here just to make sure I am leaving. My leader over in the House is here—NANCY PELOSI. I will talk about her more. My colleagues

from the House came over in the midst of all their work. I love them. I have enjoyed working with them.

I look around this Chamber, and I realize the reason I am able to actually leave is because I know each of you and your passion to make life better for people, and that is what it is all about.

When I decided not to run for reelection, you know how the press always follows you around. They said: "Is this bittersweet for you?"

My answer was forthcoming: "No way is it bitter. In every way it is sweet."

Why do I feel that way? It is because this has been a dream, to be in a profession that I think is noble, no matter how beaten up it gets, for 40 years—for more than half my life—and I was able to do every day what I always wanted to do, which is simply to make life better for people. I didn't always succeed. Were there frustrations? Yes. Were there disappointments? Yes. Were there defeats? Yes, many, but every morning when I woke up, I knew I had a chance to do something good.

As a first generation American on my mother's side, and, most particularly, as a woman, I never in my wildest dreams imagined that I could be in the U.S. Senate. It was an uphill battle, and I know I speak for a lot of people sitting right here who know what I am talking about.

When I first ran for the Marin County Board of Supervisors in 1972, it was a Republican landslide year. It was more than tough. I will never forget one woman I spoke with after knocking on her door. I introduced myself and said, "Hi, I am Barbara Boxer. I am running for county supervisor."

She greeted me by saying, "I never thought you would be so short." Then, she said she wasn't supporting me because, quote, "You have four kids, and you are going to neglect them if you are elected."

Well, never mind that this was a part-time job just a few minutes from the house. Never mind that the man I was running against had a family and a full-time job. Never mind that I actually had two kids, but she insisted. She said, "I know you have four kids because I read it in the newspaper."

I said, "Lady, when you give birth, you never forget it, and I did it twice."

Well, I lost that seat, but two things helped get me through it. The first was an article by Gloria Steinem, who essentially said women tend to take losses too personally. We have to understand that we could be just a little bit ahead of our time, and we can't give up.

Second, my son Doug, only seven at the time, ignored any attempts to cheer him up by saying, "Mom, can you make me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch?"

The point is that life goes on no matter how deep the disappointments. You pick yourself up, and you keep fighting because this is your country. It is our country, and it is worth fighting for. I