

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