

I asked her to share some thoughts with me about it, and she did.

Two weeks later I was back in the Senate and Senator BYRD was coming in in a wheelchair. In the last part of his life he lost the ability to walk. He never lost his voice, never lost his mind either. But he came in, and I stopped to say hello to him, see how he was doing, and I said: Leader, I just met a woman over in Delaware the other day who knew you from your little supermarket in Sophia, WV.

I told him about it, and he smiled. He said: Do you remember her name? Do you remember her name?

Ironically, I could not remember it. But if I had, he would have. He was amazing.

Some people think the reason he got elected to office so many times, in the legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives and in the Senate, was because he was so good at, frankly, looking out for West Virginia economically, making sure they were not left behind. He was also a pretty good politician. He was good at names.

I remember once, when we had a funeral for my mom who died about 4 years ago, and we had a celebration of her life just outside of Beckley. We had it in the home, a very large home of a family who had 19 kids. One of them married my cousin, Dan Patton. Some people have a dining room; they had like a banquet hall for their meals. We were all gathered in this banquet hall, paying tribute to my mom, reflecting on her memory, and I was walking around the house afterwards, and I came across a CONGRESSIONAL RECORD tribute on the wall of this house. It was a tribute from ROBERT BYRD honoring this family. I was just blown away. I couldn't wait to get back to the Senate the next week and say to Senator BYRD: You will never guess whose house I was in.

I told him the name of the house, the family, and he said: I remember that guy. He is a barber. They have 19 kids.

This guy was just amazing. I used to call him on his birthday. I used to call him not just on his birthday but when he and Erma had an anniversary. I would call him on Christmas and other special occasions just to see how he was doing and let him know I was thinking about him.

I think it was his 90th birthday, and I called him and I said: Leader, I think it is your birthday today.

He said: Yes, it is.

I said: How old are you, anyway?

I knew.

He said: Well, I'm 90.

I said: I just hope when I am 90 I can just sit up and take nourishment.

Mr. President, he said: I hope you can, too.

He was amazing.

He and JOE BIDEN share the same birthday. Sometimes I would call Senator BYRD on his birthday and say: Leader? He said: Governor, is that you?

I said: That's me. I always get this confused, who is older, you or BIDEN?

He said: I still got him by a couple of years, but he is catching up on me.

I guess now he will really have a chance to catch up.

I came here as a freshman Senator. I had been in the House, and a Governor before. I came in as a freshman in 2001. I was about the age of the pages down here. I remember Senator BYRD really took a bunch of us under his wing. He became sort of my mentor. I think the fact we had this West Virginia connection made it even more special for me, and I think maybe for him.

He taught us how to preside. He explained to us the rules of the Senate. He knew the rules better than anybody else and he was able to work the rules, use the rules to get things done—or not, to keep things from getting done. Boy, he was good. He taught us how to behave in the Senate, and he did that—not just for us but for people who had been here for 20, 30, 40 years. If they were acting up, making too much noise on the Senate floor, he would stop them dead in their tracks.

He once said to me the most important role for the Presiding Officer, Mr. President—he said the most important role of the Presiding Officer is to keep order. That is what he said. He said: If you can keep order, the rest is pretty easy. I always remembered that.

He presented to me my Golden Gavel. The Presiding Officer has a Golden Gavel. You get it after presiding so many hours in the Senate. But I was very honored to receive mine from Senator BYRD.

When I got here in 2001 I think he was 83, an age when most people are ready to sit back and take it easy. He was just picking up speed. As Senator FEINSTEIN said, he could take to the Senate floor without a note, give a speech on just about any subject, throw in all kinds of anecdotes with respect to ancient Rome and Greek mythology, recite poems and stuff.

I once said to him: How do you remember all those poems?

He would say: I just make them up.

He was just kidding. He actually was able to remember them. I sometimes have a hard time remembering where I am supposed to be for my next meeting.

He was from West Virginia, the southern part of West Virginia. As others have said, his views on race as a younger man and as a new person in the Senate were not the same views that he left with. He matured, grew up.

He once said to me: The worst vote I ever cast, I actually voted against and spoke against the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

I think he sort of went to his grave regretting that. But I think he went to his grave having atoned, if you will, for that sin. He changed his views with respect to race. In part it was a matter of conscience—he was a person of deep faith—but I think also probably he changed, in part, because of the prodding and cajoling of, among others, one of his best friends, Senator Ted Kennedy.

As I said earlier, I loved to call him on special days. I would almost always call him when I was back in West Virginia, call him on my cell phone, call him at his home in McLean. It wasn't his birthday or anything and I would call him.

I would say: Leader?

He would say: Is that you, Governor?

I would say: Yes, I am driving down to West Virginia on the Virginia Turnpike heading toward Beckley.

He would say: No kidding.

I said: I am trying to remember which exit to get off of. The first one is Harper Road, then there is another one. The third one, I can't remember that. What is that?

He would say: That's my road, the Robert C. Byrd Drive exit.

I would always have a good time with him for that. Others have spoken about all the leadership roles he played here, all the votes he cast, all that he did. He did so much for West Virginia. I love to go back to West Virginia. I think the friendliest people I have ever met in my life are from West Virginia. It is kind of a hardscrabble place. They have come a long ways, in no small part because of his enormous help. He has been accused of trying to hijack Washington and move it to West Virginia and bring in all kinds of Federal agencies and jobs.

He was really trying to make sure West Virginia did not get left out, and I think thanks to his intervention, they did not.

He made life a lot better for the folks who live in West Virginia today, and who lived there for the last 58 years. He also made life better for a generation of Americans, maybe a couple of generations of Americans, in looking back, and maybe even looking forward as well. He is going to make their life better, looking forward, for the people in this country who need health care, the people in this country who need a decent place to live, a chance to buy a home, a chance to get an education, the opportunity to improve their station in life.

More than anybody I know, for a guy who was born, orphaned in North Carolina as an infant, who was traded off by his mom in her last will and testament—she wanted him to be raised by her sister who lived in West Virginia, and her sister took this young man in. His name was not ROBERT BYRD. But she took in her nephew. She and her husband raised ROBERT BYRD in tough situations, hardscrabble situations, and he sort of raised himself by the bootstraps and worked hard all of his life to make something of his life and to serve as a model for us in the end, and a model for our country.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

GENERAL DAVID PETRAEUS

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I rise today to voice my strong support

for GEN David Petraeus to be confirmed as our Nation's top military commander in Afghanistan. I want to say I have had a great experience with General Petraeus and also watching him from afar. When he introduced the concept of the counterinsurgency in Iraq, and embedding our troops with Iraqi troops to try to train the Iraqi troops to do the security for Iraq as we were leaving, I had grave concerns about embedding our troops and the counterinsurgency, because I feared for the safety of our troops and troop protection. I did not want to publicly ask questions of his judgment or disagree with him, but I did ask him to come see me and explain this to me so I would feel more comfortable, which he did. He came to my office. He walked me through it. He gave me confidence that it could work.

Then later, when he was in Iraq, and I was taking one of the trips I have made to Iraq, the first place that General Petraeus sent me to see was the Iraqi police station with our embedded troops. He never said a word to me about my questioning of how it would work, but he sent me in.

Later that night I was able to have dinner with him and Ambassador Crocker. I said: I know why you sent me to the police station, because I had questioned how you were going to protect our troops. I became a complete believer in General Petraeus and certainly how they do protect our troops as we are also teaching the foreign forces to take on their own security.

So I do have complete confidence in this man. What I do not have confidence in is the mission he is being given, because I sense a mixed message. I sense a mixed message from the President, and a division in what our Members of the Senate are saying, even as they questioned General Petraeus yesterday.

Here is my concern. We know you cannot set a hard and fast deadline and say, our troops are leaving no matter what the conditions are, and gain the confidence of the people on the ground that you are going to see the mission through.

It seems our mission should be clear, that we are going to prepare the Afghans for the security of their country, and also assure that the Taliban and al-Qaida cannot get a stronghold that would allow the export of terrorism to America and other freedom-loving countries in the world. That should be the clear mission.

I believe that is the mission General Petraeus understands, and I think that is what President Obama is saying. But my concern is this questioning of General Petraeus by members of the Armed Services Committee about the withdrawal date.

The President has said firmly the withdrawal is going to be July of next year. General Petraeus is very careful in every answer that he makes to say, conditions on the ground will dictate when we withdraw. July is the date. We

acknowledge that, he says. But it will also depend on conditions on the ground.

I hope we will have a united view in the Senate, a united view in the House of Representatives, and the President acknowledging that we must have the confidence of the people on the ground in Afghanistan and also the confidence of the enemy, the Taliban, and al-Qaida, that we are not going to leave in July if there are not conditions on the ground for the Afghans to repel the evil forces of the Taliban and al-Qaida.

As we vote today on the confirmation of General Petraeus, I am voting for this general because I believe in him. I believe in his creativity. I believe in his judgment. I want to make sure he has everything he needs to do the job we are asking him to do. He has proven he can do the tough jobs.

He changed the atmosphere in Iraq and he did it the right way. He protected our forces as he was doing it. So we must assure that we give him the same level of confidence and support in Afghanistan to do the job there, because it is clear that the place where al-Qaida and the Taliban are operating from is that area of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and we cannot allow them to strengthen their efforts to be able to export terrorism to our country again.

At the same time, we have got to make sure there is not a bull's-eye on the back of our troops in Afghanistan because the enemy thinks we are leaving no matter what. Conditions on the ground are the prerequisite. I hope the President has given General Petraeus the level of confidence that I feel in him, and that I think our Senate will show to him today to do the job as he sees fit, because he is going to have the boots on the ground in Afghanistan.

I have been to Afghanistan, as have most of my colleagues. I know how tough it is, the terrain, the type of government they have had throughout their centuries, and it is not adaptable easily to our concept of governance. So we have to work within a framework that is very difficult both geographically as well as in the governance structure.

I am voting for General Petraeus today because I know this man can do the job. I hope the President will give him the free rein to do the job we are asking him to do, and, in the process, protect our troops and protect him as they are doing this very tough job with everything he asks us to provide to him to finish this job and make the Afghan people say—give them the ability to create their governance in a way that works for them and to protect the people of the United States from any further terrorist attack.

That is when we will be able to say "mission accomplished." And General Petraeus can do this job. We must give him the backup so he can be successful.

I yield the floor and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LEVIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF DAVID H. PETRAEUS TO BE GENERAL

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of David H. Petraeus, Department of the Army, to be General.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be 20 minutes for debate with respect to the nomination, with the time equally divided and controlled between the Senator from Michigan, Mr. LEVIN, and the Senator from Arizona, Mr. MCCAIN, or their designees.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I yield myself 8 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is recognized.

Mr. LEVIN. The Senate will soon vote on the nomination of GEN David Petraeus, who is once again stepping forward to render invaluable service to our Nation, as he has so often in the past. Certainly the events that bring General Petraeus to this moment were unforeseen. But we can be certain that when confirmed, he will bring highly experienced leadership and a profound understanding of the President's strategy in Afghanistan which he helped shape as Commander of the U.S. Central Command.

General Petraeus confirmed yesterday before the Armed Services Committee that he fully supports the President's strategy. That strategy includes a surge of U.S. combat troops who will be in place later this year.

That strategy includes a counterinsurgency campaign focused on securing the safety of Afghanistan's population and pursuing the insurgents who threaten that safety. The President's strategy, which General Petraeus supports, includes the setting of a July 2011 date to begin reductions of U.S. combat troops as a way of focusing the attention of the Afghan Government and military on preparing Afghan forces to take greater responsibility for the security of their own people. I have long believed that focusing on building the capacity of the Afghan security forces to secure their nation's future is