

during those 24 hours she made a bold prediction for her time about the future role women would play in the Senate. She said: "When the women of the country come in and sit with you . . . you will get ability, you will get integrity of purpose, you will get exalted patriotism, and you will get unstinted usefulness." I will second that.

BARBARA and I served together in the House—and we have served together in the Senate for 20 years. And let me tell you, no one embodies Senator FELTON's prediction better than BARBARA BOXER.

Throughout the years, I have loved getting to know BARBARA as a colleague, but more importantly as a friend. Loretta and I joined BARBARA and her husband, Stu, on official trips, personal vacations and countless dinners. We have eaten, drank, joked, and bonded. And as her career in the Senate comes to an end, keeping those bonds of friendship strong as she heads west is one my life goals.

BARBARA made quite an impact on the Senate Chamber before she even entered this body. On October 9, 1991, the Senate Judiciary Committee was set to vote on the nomination of Justice Clarence Thomas to serve a lifetime appointment on the U.S. Supreme Court, without listening to Professor Anita Hill's allegations of sexual harassment. At the time, there were two women in the Senate, BARBARA MIKULSKI and Nancy Landon Kassebaum. Now, while this was going on in the Senate, the women of the House tried speaking out in that body. They were censured. And they had enough. So they marched out of the House and over to the Senate—29 women House Members, led by Congresswoman Pat Schroeder from Colorado and BARBARA BOXER from California. American politics has never been the same.

The following year, a number of esteemed women were elected to the U.S. Senate. Several reporters deemed 1992: "the Year of the Woman." Senator MIKULSKI, the dean of women, as she is often referred to, said: "Calling 1992 the Year of the Woman makes it sound like the Year of the Caribou or the Year of the Asparagus. We're not a fad, fancy or a year." She was right. But California made history. For the first time, one State sent two women to represent them in the Senate: DIANNE FEINSTEIN and BARBARA BOXER.

BARBARA often reminds me of the line from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "Though she be but little, she is fierce." In 1994, when Republicans took control of Congress, one of the first things they did was go after environmental regulations, including rules to limit the amount of arsenic in the drinking water. BARBARA immediately launched a good, old-fashioned, 3-day "Ms. Smith Goes to Washington" filibuster. And like most of the fights she takes on, she won.

BARBARA is a call-it-as-you-see-it kind of person. Maybe it is because she grew up in the no-nonsense, working-

class town of Brooklyn. Or maybe it is because her parents and Jewish grandparents, who immigrated to this country from Russia instilled in her a deep love for America's Constitution and freedoms—a sense of obligation to give something back and a determination to fight for underdogs, truth and justice.

She has sponsored or cosponsored more than 1,200 pieces of legislation and helped lead the fight on issues ranging from women's rights to healthcare to protecting California's natural wonders to keeping lead and other potentially lethal hazards out of children's toys.

The vote that sealed our spiritual kinship took place in October 2002 when she and I voted against the Iraq war resolution. One of our dear friends, Paul Wellstone, also voted against the resolution. Paul was in a tough reelection fight that year. A reporter asked him if it was a hard choice to vote against the war. Paul said it was a risk, but not a choice. His conscience wouldn't let him vote any other way. It seems to me that is how BARBARA BOXER approaches every one of her votes in Congress: It might be a risk, but it is not a choice. She listens to her conscience, and the people of California respect her for it. But let me be clear: that doesn't mean she will not work hard to find a compromise.

She proved that in recent years when she and JIM INHOFE—the unlikelyst of odd couples—worked together to pass important legislation updating regulations on toxic chemicals and shepherding through a surface transportation bill that no one thought could be done.

I will close with this. Early in BARBARA's political career, people used to come up to her and say: How did you get so strong, how did you get so tough? BARBARA would humbly respond: Oh, not tough. I am just an ordinary person, and I do what I think is right. I agree with most of that, but let me tell you—BARBARA is as tough as they come. She can't be bullied or intimidated, and she never loses her courage. I want to thank BARBARA for sacrificing so much time with her own family to make the families of America safer, healthier, and more hopeful. For that and a thousand other reasons, I will miss her in the Senate. But I know I can count on her to keep pushing those of us who remain to listen to our consciences—to fight for change and do the right thing.

MARKETPLACE FAIRNESS BILL

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this past Thanksgiving marked the beginning of the holiday shopping season.

In an effort to find deeply discounted electronics, toys, and other Christmas gifts for family and friends, bargain-hunting shoppers searched for Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals.

While these deals provided great savings for shoppers, Main Street retailers and States did not reap the same benefits.

Because we have let another year and holiday season come and go without closing the online sales tax loophole, States missed out on millions of dollars in sales tax revenue owed to them from online purchases. And Main Street retailers continued to lose business.

However, this was not without trying.

Around this time last year, Senators ENZI, ALEXANDER, HEITKAMP, and myself opposed the air dropping of legislation in the customs conference report that would have taken away a State's right to collect taxes on accessing the internet unless we gave States the ability to collect taxes on internet sales that were already owed, and we leveled the playing field for brick and mortar businesses.

Despite our opposition, the customs bill passed, and Majority Leader MCCONNELL promised to give us a vote later this year on the Marketplace Fairness Act or similar e-fairness legislation.

This would give House Republicans the opportunity to go through regular order, a process they said was necessary to address the issue.

Yet, unfortunately, here we are, at the end of the Congress, and House Republicans have still refused to act.

The Marketplace Fairness Act levels the playing field for retailers by allowing States to treat brick and mortar retailers the same as remote retailers in the collection of State and local sales and use taxes.

Internet retailers benefit under our current system with a 5-10 percent price advantage over their Main Street competitors.

This is because customers visit local retailers, browse goods, use their phone to take a picture of it, and go online to purchase the item tax-free.

Products sold online seem cheaper when sales taxes are not collected at the point of sale. But they are not because the tax is still owed, though not paid, by the customer.

This is not fair, and it is not right.

Thousands of Main Street businesses have worked hard to grow their businesses, but have become showrooms because of this price advantage, making it difficult, and, in some cases, impossible for them to compete.

I have come to this floor in the past to share the stories of Main Street businesses, such as Play It Again Sports in Naperville and Soccer Plus in Palatine, that have gone out of business due, in large part, to the unfair advantage of their online competitors.

Since then, Sports Authority has met that same fate, and many department stores and big-box retailers have closed a number of stores because of the increase in online shopping.

These are local jobs and community anchors that no longer exist.

There is nothing we can do now for these shuttered retailers. But we can,

and should, still help thousands of retailers avoid the same fate by leveling the playing field for Main Street retailers.

For the first time in history, consumers said they made more of their purchases online than in stores.

This trend is evidenced by an increase in online retail spending, which grew 14.6 percent last year, to \$341 billion, and is projected to reach \$523 billion in 2020.

During the weekend following Thanksgiving—the biggest shopping weekend of the year—online retail spending was over \$9.3 billion, a 16.4 percent increase from 2015.

As online sales increase, the potential sales tax revenue that States lose increases.

The longer we delay in closing this loophole, the longer we perpetuate an uneven playing field between local and online retailers that erodes the revenues needed by State and local governments to fund essential public services.

Despite the looming budget deficits State and local governments are facing and the competitive disadvantage experienced by brick and mortar businesses, House Republicans have refused to address the issue for more than a decade.

This year is no different.

Numerous requests to the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee to markup e-fairness legislation from the ranking member and other bipartisan members on committee, Main Street retailers, State and local governments, labor, and the sponsors of the Marketplace Fairness Act remain unanswered.

Instead, Chairman GOODLATTE drafted his own proposal that created more problems than it solved.

I didn't support the chairman's proposal, but I supported the process and his calls for regular order and encouraged him to work with his colleagues in the House to send us a bill so that we can resolve our differences.

We are still waiting.

The chairman has continued to refuse to work with us on reasonable compromise legislation that didn't turn 100 years of sales and use tax law on its head, even though he doesn't have the support of the majority of the House Republican Caucus on his approach.

It is apparent that these calls for compromise and regular order are nothing more than veiled attempts to delay and obstruct, which have so far been successful.

If Congress continues to ignore this issue and fails to act, the courts will.

Because States are missing out on an estimated \$23 billion a year in potential sales tax revenue, they are looking to the courts for a solution, heeding the call from Supreme Court Justice Kennedy to reexamine the Court's precedent on the issue.

This year alone, 16 States have introduced over 40 sales tax bills, and others have enacted legislation that have triggered legal challenges that would help

States collect sales tax without congressional action.

This week, a Federal court in South Dakota will begin hearing oral arguments on a South Dakota law that requires remote retailers to collect and remit sales tax.

And we may know, as early as next week, if the Supreme Court will grant review of a law Colorado recently enacted that imposes reporting and notification requirements on remote retailers.

Let me be clear. This is not the approach I prefer. I would rather Congress do its job to pass a uniform, comprehensive Federal solution instead of the States moving forward individually so we don't have a patch work of laws that small businesses have to navigate.

But I understand that, in the absence of Congressional action, the States have no other options. They must either raise taxes or cut vital public services if Congress continues to sit on the sidelines.

As you can see, the States are no longer waiting for Congress to get its act together.

But there is still time for us address this issue.

And I hope my colleagues in the House will work with me to do that before it is too late.

ELECT AND FREEING OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE GAMBIA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in recent years, we have seen a troubling trend of democratic backsliding in several parts of the world, including Russia, Thailand, Uganda, Turkey, and Venezuela.

Even some parts of Europe and the United States have seen long established democratic norms challenged in deeply upsetting ways.

So imagine my great surprise late last week when the people of The Gambia peacefully voted for a new democratic government.

Many probably don't know much about The Gambia—a small West African nation whose uniquely odd colonial borders have it straddling the meandering Gambia River almost completely surrounded by Senegal.

Gambia is English speaking—Senegal speaks French—with several local languages shared between the unusual borders.

Some of you may remember The Gambia was the ancestral home in the novel and then-television miniseries "Roots."

Because of its strong ties to the U.S. and geographic location, for some time The Gambia also had a unique distinction of being an emergency landing spot for the Space Shuttle should one need to abort its mission early in the launch phase.

And until 1994, it had the proud distinction of being the longest postcolonial democracy on the African continent.

You see, for the last 22 years, The Gambia was ruled by a regime that

took power in a coup, with troubling arrests and disappearances of journalists, activists, and opposition members.

I and several of my Senate colleagues raised a number of these cases over the years, most notably the 2007 disappearance of journalist Ebrima Manneh—for which I now hope there will finally be a fair and healing accounting.

And yet, last Thursday night, the people of The Gambia, voting with colored marbles placed in different containers to make it easier for illiterate voters, chose a new leader in a peaceful and democratic process.

And outgoing President Yahya Jammeh honorably conceded the election and agreed to a peaceful transfer of power.

He offered to help President-Elect Adama Barrow.

While we have had our differences, I want to acknowledge this important act of leadership and love of country by outgoing President Jammeh.

And not only has there been this notable peaceful transfer of power, but in just the few short days since the election, at least 18 political prisoners have been released from jail, including a key opposition figure.

So to the Gambian people, let me say congratulations on your important demonstration of democracy—a model for the African continent and the world.

I look forward to significantly improved relations between our two nations and working together on a host of shared concerns.

TRIBUTE TO BARBARA MIKULSKI

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, history is dotted with the stories of trailblazers. People who shape the public discourse at a pivotal moment in time or change the direction of the debate. One of those trailblazers is BARBARA MIKULSKI, the longest serving woman in Senate history, the first woman to represent Maryland in the U.S. Senate, and the first woman to chair the Senate's Appropriations Committee. She is tough. She is direct. She is dedicated. She is a fighter. She is a leader.

BARBARA MIKULSKI has always fought for our families and our children. From her roots as a social worker and community activist to the levels of leadership in the Senate, she has held firm to her adage that she is not just the Senator from Maryland, she is the Senator for Maryland. From her first years in the Senate until now, she has promoted education, nutrition, healthcare, and gender equality in the Senate.

She led our historic efforts to pass the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act—shouting from the rooftops the simple principle that women deserve equal pay for equal work. She continued that legacy with the Paycheck Fairness Act. Wouldn't it be a fitting tribute if the Senate considered and approved that commonsense legislation before she retires?