

And, as you mentioned, with ELISSA SLOTKIN, this incredible new leader coming to the Senate, you made sure that your legacy carried on with her election. So we thank you for that.

I have had the great privilege of watching you stand up firsthand in those Agriculture rooms and hearing rooms to stand up for nutrition like no one really has ever done before in a leadership position in that committee; how you have stood up for our farmers, yes, but also for the people that rely on getting that affordable food; your standing up for the autoworkers, I think, in the wayback zone, when you stood up at that horrible time for the industry and you were there for them; the investing in mental healthcare.

You mentioned one of my favorite stories, and that story is, yes, rather hilarious because DEBBIE, I want you to picture, was one of the few, if not the only, women in the room, one of two—as the Presiding Officer knows, DEBBIE will be one phone call away to correct us on what we have to say; at any time, we know whom to call—one of two women in that room. And as the male Senator was saying, “I don’t know; I wouldn’t need those benefits,” it was DEBBIE who said, “I bet your mother did.”

And the point of that story was actually more than just the moment and that she got those benefits in; it was also that she was one of the first women in such a leadership role.

There are a few here today, including Senator MURRAY. We think back to Senator Mikulski and others. But DEBBIE carried on that mantle, and she did it so well in leadership in the Senate and through her work chairing the committee.

But we all know that her work didn’t end in this place. She also led on agriculture and other issues worldwide. I will never forget that she led the first all-women’s trip to Africa, and we made stops in Senegal and Ethiopia and Tanzania.

And in my closing story here, if you remember, Senator STABENOW, the woman in Ethiopia, the farmer. She had a little plot of—she was raising teff, and she was alone. Her husband had died, and she was raising a number of kids by herself. And she had become a leader on sanitation for the area, and she had this little graph up on the wall, provided by one of our foundations, that showed her hut in the middle with a star on it.

And we were all asking these Senator-like questions about her crops and about her challenges of the walking 2 hours to fill the water every single day. And finally someone asked: What is your biggest challenge?

And here is this woman in this little hut with only one solar panel, walking 2 hours every day, and she says: Challenges? And she points to this chart of her hut and says: I have no challenges. I am a leader.

DEBBIE STABENOW is a leader, and she has gotten through a lot in the early

days of women getting elected to these jobs. To be able to get here in the first place and then to be able to rise to where she is has been an incredible tribute to her perseverance, to her incredible staff, and to the people of Michigan.

We thank you, DEBBIE. We know you are only going to be a phone call away. And for those of us on the Ag Committee, all we have to do is look up and see your smiling face among those fruits and vegetables. Thank you for your service.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The Senator from Michigan.

#### TRIBUTE TO TERESA PLACHETKA

Ms. STABENOW. Madam President, there is one more thing that I would like to do. And I want to thank so many people for their kind words—so many “kinds” today. I am so grateful for that. But I have one more really important thing that I want to do before I relinquish the microphone this afternoon, and that is to honor a true public servant, my longtime State director and dearest friend, Teresa Plachetka.

I am going to start with a bold statement. And, by the way, Teresa has been with me for 42 years—42, not 24—42 years. And I want to start by making a bold statement: There is no one who has done more for the people of the State of Michigan and for Team Stabenow than Teresa Plachetka.

The first time I met Teresa, I was in my first term in the Michigan State House. She was my first graduate student intern. She graduated, and I hired her as my first policy staffer in 1982 for the State house mental health committee. She has been at my side ever since for every decision, big and small, for 42 years.

I just gave my farewell speech on the floor, and it is so fitting that Teresa is here because what a journey this has been. We all have policy experts and communications experts and experts to run our campaigns and experts in technology, but I am not sure anyone else has all of those skills in one person. I got her. She is truly one of a kind.

I have been trying to think of the right words or the right stories to sum up our time together but realized: How can you possibly summarize almost 42 years of history and friendship? Maybe we can start with a variation on a very simple phrase: Did you talk to Teresa? Go talk to Teresa. Or what does Teresa think? Or have we asked Teresa?

These are familiar phrases in my office and have been for decades, not just from the team but from me. Whether it is taking the temperature on an issue in Michigan, getting the history of what we have done in the past, or just checking in, the team and I have always known we needed to get her gut check on everything we did. That is how vital she is and has been for us. I can’t think of any issue during our time together where she didn’t have critical input.

Because of that, the Stabenow team, me, and the State of Michigan have been the beneficiaries of her knowledge, her creativity, and her gut instincts for decades—solving problems, making people’s lives better every day.

Since these jobs are often so intense and incredibly stressful and time consuming, as we know, you might be asking yourself: How on Earth has Teresa been so successful for all this time?

Where do I begin?

Well, first, she is a brilliant political strategist who stays calm under pressure. During my first Senate campaign, almost no one believed we could win. In fact, pretty much everyone thought I should have stayed in the House and waited my turn, but not Teresa. We were down 9 points heading into Labor Day, but we had a strategy, and Teresa never wavered in her belief that we could win. And we stuck to it, and we knew it was a winning strategy, and we won.

In every tough situation—the auto rescue, the Flint water crisis, September 11, COVID, multiple elections—Teresa kept calm under pressure and helped us pick the right strategy to be effective and get things done.

Multiple staffers over the years have said she has taught them how to approach a tough situation. Like I said before, during all of these moments, the most asked question was always: What does Teresa think? And how would Teresa handle this?

That is how she has kept us all focused on the task at hand.

That extended no further than the communications coming out of our office each and every day. I know that there are a few staff—the press staffers right now—that are here or watching from home that remember and may be twitching at the thought of Teresa’s red edits on their draft releases.

But Teresa had a phrase which went, “People assume your only priorities are the ones you are currently talking about.” That phrase has been burned into the memory of just about every team member we have had over the years. It sounds simple, but sticking to it is so very hard at a time when so much is happening in our State and our country. It is also what has kept us all focused on message. And, most importantly, it has reminded us that in the end, for us, it is all about Michigan.

Teresa made certain that Michigan was at the heart of everything we did, and that started with our State team—from scheduling multiday tours across the State to ensuring every constituent case, piece of mail, or phone call was responded to with respect. Teresa ran the State operation like a Swiss—or we would say Shinola—watch.

Our regional managers were literally everywhere. In fact, there wasn’t a time when I would walk through an airport where someone wouldn’t come up to me and thank our team for attending an event, answering their email, or helping them get something

done. I wish Teresa could have been there for all of those thank-yous because she was the one that made it all work.

So what is her secret sauce? Well, as we know, it is all about systems. Teresa is known for being incredibly organized and developing the systems that have made the office run. If she sees a problem or something that can be done better, she works with the team to find a better way to accomplish the goal. It could be something small, such as changing the days of staff calls so the week and information flow work better, to organizing huge, effective appropriations processes every single year.

If there is a system in our office that works well, it was Teresa that created it and made it work. If it didn't work well, then that staffer probably didn't check with Teresa.

During the pandemic, she regularly solicited feedback on what was working and what was not. She also took time to stop and ask important questions like: What did we learn from how we worked during the pandemic, and how should the office adapt going forward? Instead of just working in the same way we had before the pandemic, Teresa made sure our office adapted.

Some of these systems are so infamous that when staff have transitioned to new jobs, the No. 1 thing we hear is that these places don't have nearly the level of efficient organizing and that Teresa would be mortified by the lack of systems.

Teresa also knew then in order for all of this to work, we had to be a team. Teresa genuinely cares about the people she works with. Over the last few weeks, as I have been thinking about this speech, our team couldn't say enough about how Teresa supports them both professionally and personally. The best part of it all, despite all she has accomplished, Teresa doesn't take herself too seriously. Her sense of humor and levity helps keep things going.

She always made it a priority that the DC and State staff were connected as one team, making sure DC staff came to Michigan often and got to know their counterparts and were not afraid to pick up the phone, talk through an issue, and work together.

One of her tools for keeping us all together was our infamous staff retreats in Michigan. Teresa spent hours making sure every detail was just right; that we had a goal and a purpose for getting together, as well as having some fun.

Whether it was one of our staple boat cruises to ensure we experienced our Great Lakes to a few acting sessions where the very best DEBBIE STABENOW impression was made—while I was gone, by the way—Teresa organized all of it.

A common discussion in our office is what everyone's favorite staff retreat was over the years and swapping stories from gatherings. While they are

difficult and a pain to organize, especially as the team got larger and larger, I know she loved showing everyone what "Pure Michigan" really means. Whether it is our food, our water, our wine, our beer, or a freezing cold boat cruise, Teresa always lit up when the team was back in Michigan.

So let me just say—as you can see, I could go on and on about Teresa, but I want to end by saying the biggest thank you possible. I know her wonderful husband Geoff, her kids, Zach and Rachel, and grandkids, Oliver, Ellie, and Valerie, are watching from Michigan and are incredibly proud of her. I know our team is here, too, watching from the Gallery and watching from home and they, too, are so incredibly proud to have served with Teresa.

Maybe the word I am thinking of right now that sums it up is "legacy." Teresa's legacy for our staff and for the State of Michigan will be felt for many, many years to come. Together, we experienced more than either of us probably thought was ever possible, forgotten more amazing stories than we would like to admit—and we will keep some of the stories between just us. It has truly been a lifetime of memories and friendship.

Teresa, I can't thank you enough for being by my side through this amazing journey and for being with me these final days in the U.S. Senate. We said we would run through the tape together, and I am really grateful we have.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. I ask unanimous consent I be permitted to speak for up to 4 minutes and Senator KENNEDY be permitted to speak for up to 30 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

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

LEONARD PELTIER

Mr. SCHATZ. Madam President, as President Biden considers candidates for clemency in the final weeks of his term, the Native American activist Leonard Peltier is among those who deserve grace and mercy.

Peltier was arrested in 1975 for his alleged involvement in the murder of two FBI agents in a shootout on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. But the process that led to his conviction had major issues and inaccuracies from the start.

For example, one witness whose statements were used at trial said she was told to lie and say that she was in a relationship with Peltier and that she had witnessed him shoot the agents. She later recanted that statement saying:

I was forced into this, and I feel very awful. I just wish that Leonard Peltier would get out of prison.

In another instance, according to reporting, a juror who, on day two of the trial, professed her prejudice against Native Americans was allowed to remain on the panel.

If that wasn't enough, take it from the very U.S. attorney who tried the

case. The prosecutor who tried the case, James Reynolds, said Peltier had served his sentence on "the basis of minimal evidence, a result that I strongly doubt would be upheld in any court today." In the same letter, Reynolds urged President Biden to commute Peltier's sentence, writing:

I write today from a position rare for a former prosecutor. To beseech you to commute the sentence of a man who I helped put behind bars. With time, and the benefit of hindsight, I have realized that the prosecution and continued incarceration of Mr. Peltier was and is unjust. We were not able to prove that Mr. Peltier personally committed any offense on the Pine Ridge Reservation.

Peltier is now 80 years old and has been in prison for 50 years. He is in declining health, experiencing vision loss and other illnesses. And in spite of all that, earlier this year, Federal officials denied his request for compassionate release and parole.

And so even if you believe that he did, in fact, commit the crime, surely now, the time is now to let him spend whatever remaining days he has at home to die with his family. He has done his time. He is of old age and in poor health. This is what clemency is for. This is what mercy is for. He poses little threat to society.

If there was ever a case that merited compassionate release, Leonard Peltier's is it. This is exactly what this awesome Presidential power is for—to right a historic wrong. And if not that, then just to show mercy and let an old man die with his family.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to use a prop during my remarks.

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

U.S. SAVINGS BONDS

Mr. KENNEDY. I am going to try not to use my full time, Madam President.

It has become in vogue in Washington to talk about government waste, and I am glad. I think that is a good thing. It has become in vogue to talk about inefficiencies and reducing spending, and I think that is a good thing.

I remember when I first got here back in 2017, one of my early Appropriations Committee meetings. I was green as a gourd. We had just passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. I thought to myself, you know, we are going to run some deficits for a while because we just cut taxes.

And there was an item in the budget for, I think, a 3- or 4-percent automatic pay raise for our Federal employees. They get it every year. I am not saying they don't deserve it. A lot of people deserve more money. I never heard anybody around this place stand up and say: I have a bad idea, and I need money for it. It is always a great idea. So I am not begrudging Federal employees.