

“Mr. President, I rise today proudly to introduce legislation to rename the postal facility at 141 Weston Street in Hartford, CT, as the “Barbara B. Kennelly Post Office Building.” Barbara Kennelly is a dear friend, a former member of the House of Representatives, and an outstanding citizen of Connecticut who has dedicated her life to public service on behalf of the citizens of our great State. It is long past time, and the very least that we can do to pay tribute to her in this small but lasting way.

“Barbara's life of public service came as no surprise to those of us who knew her and her family--the first family of Connecticut politics, I might add. Her father, John M. Bailey, was one of the all time great political legends of our State--a powerful political leader, confidante of John F. Kennedy, and Democratic Party chairman under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. I devoted the better half of my senior year at Yale to the study of Bailey and wrote my senior thesis, later turned into a book, on his brilliant and sophisticated use of political power. Barbara's mother was active in Democratic politics long after the death of her husband in 1975, her brother Jack served as the chief state attorney in Connecticut, and her late husband Jim was a Speaker of the Connecticut House. Politics has been in Barbara's bones practically from the time she was born. She once told a newspaper that politics didn't “come naturally, but certainly it's a lot easier when you see members of your family doing it. Obviously I was watching my father all the time and learning through osmosis.”

“She had good instructors and she learned well. After serving on the Hartford City Council and as Connecticut's Secretary of State, Barbara was elected to Congress in 1982 and served with distinction until 1999, when she answered her party's call to run for governor.

“Like her father, she was a hard-driving and skilled tactician in the House, working the back corridors of politics and shunning the bright lights of the modern media ever in search of a nine-second sound bite.

“She was an insider, a loyal Member of the House leadership, and a golf partner to the likes of Danny Rostenkowski. She rose in through the party ranks making few enemies, seeking consensus, playing fair, and gathering strength one vote at a time. Through the 1980s and 1990s, she was one of the more powerful women in the Congress--part feminist hero, part backroom pol. She had a knack for getting along with the good old boys even as she pushed the boundaries for women's rights.

“In 1984, she was thrilled to be chosen to nominate Geraldine Ferraro as the first woman Vice Presidential candidate on a Democratic ticket. Years afterward, Barbara said that moment was one of the high points of her career. But there would be many others. In her second term, House Speaker Tip O'Neill recognized her ability and appointed her to serve on the prestigious tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, a committee most members wait years to join. She also became the first woman member of the House Intelligence Committee. And in 1991, she became the first woman to join the House leadership as a chief deputy whip.

“We miss her strong presence and her wise counsel here in Congress but are grateful for her continuing work on behalf of seniors as the President of the National Committee to Preserve

Social Security and Medicare. I appreciate the opportunity to help honor a great woman in this way.