

**Elected to the Senate in 1993, Boxer took strong stances on gun control and environmental issues. Boxer served four terms as United States senator from California, from 1993 to 2017. She ultimately became one of the most influential progressive political figures in the country.**

### **Part I – Barbara Boxer Gives a Damn**

After a failed first attempt at public office and a brief career in journalism, Barbara Boxer makes the connection that will help her launch of the most successful political careers in California history.

**Carla Marinucci:** Welcome, I'm Carla Marinucci, and we're here for Capitol Weekly. This is a program funded by the California State Library. And our guest today is a former newspaper reporter, author, and senator Barbara Boxer, certainly one of the most experienced and ground-breaking legislators in state history. Welcome, senator. We have so much to get to. Let's get started. You were born in Brooklyn, New York to Sophie Silvershein and Ira Levy. Your mom was an immigrant, your dad from an immigrant family. They gave you a Jewish name meaning, "Blessing of Peace." Tell us a little bit about how that childhood in Brooklyn, how your family shaped your sense of the American dream, and the progressive values that would define you as an elected official. [chuckle]

**Barbara Boxer:** Well, thank you so much for that question. I wasn't expecting it. I thought we get right into [laughter] "What is your greatest accomplishment?" [laughter] And I just so appreciate it because all politics is personal. When I wrote my book, I talked about that. It's who we are. How you grew up. How I grew up. How everyone watching this grew up. It shapes you so much. Well, I get a little teary when I think about my mother and my father.

My dad was the youngest of nine children. They came away from Russia. They escaped. They got out because we're a Jewish family and the czars were going after the Jews. And so his brothers... He had two sisters and he had six brothers. That's right, that would be eight. And he was the 9<sup>th</sup>, born here in America, the only one. So as a result of his being the only one born in America, the sisters and the brothers just said, "Ira, you're going to go to college. You're going to be famous. You're going to be successful. You're going to learn to play the piano." And they bought him a [chuckle] piano. And so he was so ambitious not to make money, but to just learn. And education was everything. When I was 10 years old, he graduated from law school. He had gone to school at night. He got his degree at night, from City College, he got his law degree, never really practiced law much. He had little small business clients. But he instilled in me education, education, education. There wasn't even a doubt. That was what it was about.

My mother, she came here, she was nine months old in her mother's arms from Poland, also kind of escaping. It was Austria then but then became Poland, escaping the hard times there. And she never graduated from high school. She had to support her family because she was the youngest of six, and her father got very sick. And so she never graduated. She was a secretary. And I remember she always said, "Honey, you learn how to type and take a stenography because if your husband ever leaves you, you'll need those skills," because that's all women

could do in those years. Bottom line about my mother, she put all her hopes in her daughters. She was so, in a way, ashamed that she never got the high school degree. But she was one of the smartest people I know. And when I wrote my memoir, I realized that my mother had the wisdom on all the social issues that I carry in my heart today.

**CM:** You mentioned the emphasis on education. Your politicization started early, going out into the world of work. I know you wanted to be a stock broker in your early married life, but you ran up against sexism in hiring. As you wrote about it, you had to settle for being a secretary for a while. Tell us about that.

**BB:** I did. [chuckle] I graduated with a degree in economics. And so I just marched on to Wall Street and I go from firm to firm, and they say, "What do you want to do?" 'I want to be a stock broker.' They called them then "customer's men." [chuckle] Can you imagine? Customers... They didn't even hide it. And they said, "Well, women don't do that." I said, 'Well, I want to do that.' And they said, "I'm sorry, we have programs for the guys when they come out of school, but women can't do it. So I must say, ladies or girls can't do it." And I said, 'Well, fine. I'll get a job as a secretary. And then I'll study for the exam without all those programs, and I'll pass it.' So sure enough, I [chuckle] got a job as a secretary. I convinced all my employers that I can do more than that. They have me doing other things, research. Then I passed the test, and then I'm able to have my little practice on the side where I had some widows and orphans as clients. I [laughter] didn't make much. But in those years, I made \$200 a week. My husband at that time was in law school, and I was supporting the family on \$200 a week. Yeah.

**CM:** You know, I thought it was very interesting that early in your married life you yourself experienced sexual harassment. It is something you didn't reveal until the Anita Hill- Clarence Thomas hearings. Tell us about that experience, and how that may have shaped your thoughts about that issue.

**BB:** Right. Wow. That was just unreal. I was always pretty good in college, and I usually got A's. The worst I ever got in my life was a B-plus. And then I'm about to graduate and I get a D from this economics professor. And I thought, 'This is crazy.' So I called him up. He says – and this is a guy who was married with five kids at least – he says, "Oh, well, come on up. We'll discuss the test. It's fine." So I said to my husband, 'Will you take me over?' So he did. He drove me over and he said, "I'll wait downstairs." And I go upstairs to meet with this professor. I walked into a room and he shuts the door. And I thought, 'That's weird.' No one else was around because it was after graduation. You know, it was a typical thing. I'm walking into it today, everyone would just think... I never thought two seconds.

To make a long story as short as I can. I said, 'Where's my test? Did you bring it so we could go over?' He says, "Oh, no." And I said, 'Well, I'm really upset. It's wrecking my average. And I'm not happy.' And he said, "Well, let me tell you something, Barb." And this, I'll never forget it. He's... And by the way, to me, he looked like he was ancient. [laughter] You know, I was 21. He must have been 50, and I thought he was like 85. [chuckle] And he says, "You know, there are only a couple of girls in the class and you stand out to me." You know, all this baloney. "You

raised your hand and you always had an answer and you're so cute." And now I'm beginning to really wonder what the hell is going on.

So I said, 'Well, if you like me so much, why did you give me a D?' And he said, "Well, it wasn't up to par." And I said, 'You know, I'm leaving. There's no point in staying.' Remember, I'm 21 years old, and I'm this little person, he's this tall guy. And so, I get up to go and he pushes me up against the wall and pushes his face right next to my face, and I pushed him as hard as I could, grabbed the door, and ran away. So now is the interesting part of the story. I get downstairs and Stewart says, "What happened?" He looked at me and I tell him and we said, "We're going straight to the Dean." We didn't. We thought... He said, "Well, let's think about." I said, 'You're right. Let's think about it. If you go there, this guy's beloved...' This typical thing. "Let's just forget it. You got away." He and I agreed to forget about it. So I slashed it away in the deep box of memories you never want to deal with. And when Anita Hill came forward, I brought it out. And Anita Hill, I mean, honest to God, I just love her so much to this day.

**CM:** Yeah, I want to talk to you about it in depth a little bit later, but that obviously shaped a lot of your views you had experienced it yourself. You and Stewart made the decision to go to California together. It was a little bit of a risky decision, but you did it, and you became a suburban mom in Greenbrae, California in Marin County. That's where you ran for the board of supervisors for the first time, in 1972. It was your only losing race in your history. What was it about that first campaign? What did it teach you about politics? And what did it teach you about what you needed to do to win?

**BB:** Well, all such great questions. Number one, if there's a message I have for anyone who's interested in running, don't be afraid to lose once. I'm not suggesting twice, because after the second time, I think you'd figure something else out. But it is an experience and there's so many really funny stories that go along with it, which I'll tell a couple to you. 1972, women did not run for anything, I mean, seriously. And on the board of supervisors in the whole history of Marin, since the 1800s, they became a state in 1850s. There had been one other woman.

**CM:** Just one?

**BB:** Just one. And she was incredible. Vera Schultz, she's very famous in Marin because she's the one who got the new Frank Lloyd Civic Center built. Then they kicked her out of office because she was so bold. Women shouldn't be bold. And so I run against this really nice guy, Peter Arrigoni, and he was great. The reason I wanted to run was I was worried about the environment and I felt they were broadening all the streets and they weren't considering the trees, and there weren't enough stop signs for the kids, and there weren't any after-school programs and all of that stuff, so I was a bit ahead of my time, let's put it that way. So in 1972, I run for this office. No one ever heard of me, I had come to California in 1965 and I had been in Marin just a few years. So I had a very uphill climb, but it was exciting. And guess what happened? There were three people in the race, Bill Filanti, Peter Arrigoni, and myself. And I came in first in the primary thing. And then Filanti, the doctor, he had the power to decide who he was going to endorse. So we made a full court press to get him to endorse us. We appealed

to his feminist credentials, his wife was a doctor. So he comes over to the house to talk about it. This is such a great story, it says everything. And I said, 'Bill, you really can make a difference now. We need a woman. We need some change and so on and so forth.' And he says, "You really shouldn't even be running," he says. I said, 'What?' "You know, you're a woman. You shouldn't be running." And Stewart is sitting next to me, we're... I'll never forget it, facing him in the living room, and he says, "Don't you understand? Only the oppressor can free the oppressed." And I said, 'Bye, get out of my house!' And Stewart and I escorted him out of the house. Obviously, he was not a fan of mine, and he worked really hard for the other guy. Choice was an issue because I was pro-choice.

**CM:** Even back then?

**BB:** Oh, absolutely back then. It was a year before Roe. And they... Abortion has always been an issue, it's followed me through my whole career. They handed out terrible flyers at churches against me in those years, and it was a close race. I'll never forget, I lost 11,000 to 10,000. And...

**CM:** You still remember the numbers?

**BB:** I still remember the numbers. And I didn't protest like some people do today, I just accepted it. But anyhow, that was the first race. And of course, when a door closes in your face, you've gotta open it, and that's when I went into journalism.

**CM:** That's right, you were a reporter for the Pacific Sun, we mentioned that. I'd be interested to hear what your experience there, how that sort of colored your life in politics later, what kind of insight it gave you. But it also gave you the intro to John Burton. It was through that job that you met him and became an aide to him. Tell us a little bit about that.

**BB:** Yes. Well, when I went to work for the Pacific Sun Steve McNamara owned the paper. Became a good friend, he and his family. And he said, "How would you like to cover the Marin Board of Supervisors?" Now here I had just lost and I thought, 'What a dream come true. I run for this office, I lose and now I'm in the face of everybody there commenting on what I agree with and don't agree with.' I thought this a wonderful way. And so I love journalism and Carla, you know, your life has been so deep and so wonderful because of journalism. And your brain keeps going and every day there's something else, there's 10 other things, so I loved it. But it was in-depth stories, and so I was able to write in-depth stories about... I remember the California Supreme Court was one of my stories. I won a couple of prizes for my writing, which was thrilling. I exposed a whole terrible thing that was going on in Marin, where there were these balloon payments and old people would lose their home because they didn't understand that the bank said, "Oh, you know after 10 years you have to pay \$50,000." And then they took over their homes. So I had quite a time and I absolutely loved it. But then, yeah, it opened the door to meeting John Burton. I went to work for John and after working for him for a couple of years, I decided to try again for the board and I won that time.

**CM:** That's right, and you made it.

**BB:** But John is still a dear friend and he was a real supporter of mine. And unlike others at the time, it wasn't just "I'll support you." It's, "I will support you. I will help you raise money" and so on and so forth. I really do want to tell you a couple of quick stories when I was running for the board of supervisors, because I think people will not believe it. They'd be hysterical, laughing about it. But there was so much prejudice against women. And so I went out, this was 1972 when I lost my only race. I won 11 straight races after that. Knocked on the door, like that, "Who's there?" 'Barbara Boxer.' This woman opens the door and she looks let down and she says, "I didn't think you'd be so short."

[laughter]

Well, what does that have to do with anything? Okay. 'Yes I am.' And she says, "And by the way, I can never vote for you." And I said, 'But why?' And she said, "Because you have four kids and you're abandoning them to run for the board of supervisors." I said, 'Let me just say, first of all, I don't have four kids. I have two kids.' And she starts to argue with me. She says, "No, you don't, you have four kids." I said, 'What are you talking about?' She says, "I read it somewhere." I said, 'Let me tell you lady, did you ever give birth?' She said, "No." I said, 'Well I did. And you don't forget how many times you do it. And I did it twice.' [chuckle] This is the kind of stuff that you couldn't believe happened. So you had to have a sense of humor to take it... To rock and roll with it.

[laughter]

But a huge amount of prejudice at the time. I can't even tell you the prejudice. Even from the press, men, reporters were all over the place and said, "Well, how can you balance the budget?" And so on and all of that.

**CM:** You faced all of that. And yet, you became the first female president of the Marin County Board of Supervisors.

**BB:** Yeah.

**CM:** And you went on to run for Congress, succeeding John Burton. Your campaign slogan was Barbara Boxer gives a damn. [chuckle] Talk a little bit about your decision to make that very powerful move and risky move and run that race. How maybe Burton helped you in that race. And what made the difference in that win.

**BB:** Well, it was a very interesting campaign to put it mildly. I was on the board at that time. It was about six years and I loved it, but there's just so much I could do there. It's a relatively small venue, and we passed wonderful parks legislation and saved a lot of places. We saved the dairy industry. We were trying to do inclusionary housing. We had done a lot of good things. And one of the things I did that never gets mentioned, because most people don't know, is earthquake-proofed the Civic Center, which could have collapsed. And we had to do it very

quietly and all of that. So we had done a lot. But I was ready to up or out. And again, for those watching, there are certain times in your life when you know, "I'm ready to move on."

I've been blessed by that. Even when I retired people said, "How did you do that?" People, "I just knew." And so you have to be conscious of where you are in life. But that move was really interesting. John Burton had been a great Congressman, but he was addicted to drugs. He called me, he said, "I have to save my life and why don't you run for my seat?" My kids were 15 and 17 and we all got together and I said, 'Look, this is a once in a lifetime thing. It's not going to be easy.' because Louise Rennie was running and she was Diane Feinstein candidate. So it became a surrogate thing. It was John Burton had me and Diane had Louise. To make a very long story as short as I can, how did I get to Barbara Boxer gives a damn, which was the scariest slogan now that I look back on it. If you ever did it today, nobody would ever vote for you if you use the word damn.

[chuckle]

But the reason we did it is, Louise Rennie is a wonderful person and was a wonderful supervisor, gentle and kind and lovely, but the difference between us was just that. My campaign manager at the time, Clint Riley, said, "The thing about it is Louise gives a darn and you give a damn." And I looked at it and said, 'You know, maybe it's true.' Because we had a debate and Louise said... She was so sweet, and she would've been great. She said, "You know when I get to Washington," this is exactly what she said. "I'm going to knock their socks off." And I thought, 'Really?' And so, of course, the Brooklyn in me says, 'When I get there, I'm going to tell 'em off. I'm going to march.' And so that "Barbara Boxer Gives a Damn" was a very accurate explanation of the choice. We won that one. And then we went on to win after that and then serve five terms in the House.

**CM:** And when you did go to the House, as you said, you were a fighter from the start in the House. I love the anecdotes about your war at the gym. You immediately went to Congress and called out bad behavior when you saw it, even in the men's gym. Tell us about that. [laughter]

**BB:** Well, it wasn't so much bad behavior. It just was so unfair. Women [chuckle]. What we were told... There were very few women there, you have to set the stage. When I got there, it's approximately 25 women or less out of 435. Think about it. And most of the women that got there, got there because their husbands kicked the bucket. They died and then women got there for two years. But a few of us had gotten there on our own. So we were feisty. And of course coming from California where... we discussed this off camera... we move, we walk, we...

**CM:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**BB:** We go to the gym. We stay in shape. And so I said, 'Where's the gym?' That was one of the first things. And they said, "Well, there's two gyms. There's the men's gym and the women's

gym.” I said, ‘Fine. Show me the women’s gym.’ So I go there, and I am telling you with God’s honest truth, the women’s gym was about... Say, a room about 8 by 10, the whole gym.

[laughter]

**BB:** And it had five hair dryers in it.

[laughter]

**BB:** The kind [makes motion]... And some of the viewers may not, the huge chair dryers that take up a half of the room, with the hoods. And really, I’m saying, ‘Well, there’s no machines there, there’s nothing there. What do you do?’ “Well, you can do aerobics.” So at first, I did that. I had one of my friends who I knew forever, I said, ‘Will, you teach aerobics?’ She said, “Yes.” So we got Geraldine Ferraro, myself, Olympia Snowe, Barbara Kennelly, and Barbara Mikulski, and we all went to the women’s gym, because that’s...

**CM:** The 8 by 10 room?

**BB:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**BB:** And we were practically touching hands. And so that was one of the best experiences. Some of the women wore the most beautiful gym outfits because they were used to it.

[laughter]

**CM:** It was gym-friendly. Right. [laughter]

**BB:** They’re from the East Coast, they look gorgeous, and I’m in my schleppy pants. And so we started... And Claudette was leading it, she says, “Hands up.” She says, “Hands out,” and we’re touching each other, and then she says, “Hands on your hips.” And with that Barbara Mikulski said, “If I could find my hips, I wouldn’t be here.” And we started to laugh and I said, “This isn’t going to work. This is not working. We have no space.” So we go to the powers that be. They say, “No, it’s the men’s gym. Too bad. You can’t get it. And there’s a pool, and the men swim without their trunks.” We said, “Well, you have to change it. This is wrong.” So nothing. So I left to write songs, crazy words, this song – “five foot two, eyes of blue,” I wrote the lyrics, “Exercise, glamorize, where to go. Will you advise? Can’t everybody use your gym?”

[laughter]

**BB:** And it goes on like that. We put together a singing group, swear to God. We performed for Tip O’Neill, and we got in the gym.

[laughter]

**BB:** At first, they said “Oh, well, you can go only certain hours.” We said, “No.” “Well, you can go only on the weekends.” “No, I’m not here on the weekends,” but we got in the gym. But it was ridiculous.

**CM:** An amazing battle, considering...

**BB:** Yep, an amazing battle won by a sense of humor. Which is one of the lessons in life that if I have to say. You’ve got to have a sense of humor no matter what, no matter how serious the issue is, because if you have a sense of humor, it’s disarming. And when we did our little song, we were deadly [chuckle] serious... And Tip O’Neill said, “That’s ridiculous. You get in the gym.”

[laughter]

**CM:** Does anybody have a video of that song? because I’d love to see it. [laughter]

**BB:** Well, it may be around, but there is...

**CM:** Maybe.

**BB:** We have still pictures of it somewhere, so, yeah.

**CM:** Wait, while in Congress...

**BB:** Oh, they’re in my book.

**CM:** Oh, yeah.

**BB:** I think there’s a still picture of it, but yeah.

[laughter]

**CM:** Okay, I’ll look. While you were in Congress, you developed a political bond with Joe Biden in 1987 when he decided to run for president in the Democratic primary. He asked you to carry the Violence Against Women Act in the House, which was signed by Clinton, and you stood up for him at a critical time when he was accused of plagiarism, by the way. Talk a little bit about the relationship with Joe Biden, and what you admired about him back then.

**BB:** So I get to the House in 1983. He’s a powerful member already. The history goes back before the Violence Against Women Act. I went to him to help me pass the Dolphin Protection Act, because, as most people know, environment was certainly something I always cared about, in addition to a lot of other things, but I found out that dolphins were being killed because of these purse seining on dolphins, which means the tuna fishermen when they would catch the



tuna, for some reason the tuna would swim underneath the dolphin, so to get to the tuna they put a net over the dolphin, and they were killing tens of thousands of dolphins every year. So we said, "No, no, no, you can't do that." So we went to the tuna companies, to make a long story short, there was a big boycott by children, "We're not going to eat tuna sandwiches." And we passed a law that said there's going to be a tuna safe label. If you fish safely, you get the label. And so I got it done and I went to Joe Biden to get it done in the House, and that was pretty great. He said to me... Now that I think of it, I'm going to revise this. Actually, I carried this bill in the House. He came to me because his daughter, Ashley [Biden], wouldn't eat tuna sandwiches. That's what it was.

**CM:** Oh. [laughter] Geez.

**BB:** So actually, he came to me and said, "I hear you have this bill. Can I help?" We became very dear friends. He said, "You've gotta meet Ashley." Well, I think she was 10 at the time, and we became very dear friends because it was a battle and we got it done. It had to pass muster with all the trade agreements, everything, and it's still the law of the land. And when you eat your tuna, you can see a smiling dolphin on it. That's how it started. Then he came to me on the Violence Against Women Act. And I was so touched that he came to me. So I got part of it passed, a small part of it that dealt with safety on college campuses. Better lighting on campuses. It was to protect college women from intruders, but it really didn't deal with a lot of the problems that eventually the Violence Against Women did deal with, which was abuse by a partner. So we became very, very friendly and very, very close. When he ran, I supported him for president, and I was so upset when that whole plagiarism hit and advised him that he probably couldn't go forward with it. Yeah.

**CM:** I mean, as a member of the Select Committee on Children Needs and Families, you were very active on those issues. What do you see as some of your most important accomplishments in that period in Congress?

**BB:** Well, in the early years when you get into the House, it's very hard to get things done. It's a little easier now, but then they'd say, don't talk for five years. Just shut up, you don't know anything. But I got a few really good things in, and I just want to take a minute to thank the people who really helped me. One of them was my friend George Miller, who got me on that committee. And so we started to talk about how we could help kids, and he was the leader, and I really just helped him.

[background conversation]

**BB:** The Committee on Children, Youth and Families was really, it sounds like, oh, that must have been easy, it wasn't, and George Miller, a wonderful friend of mine and a Congress person from the East Bay, he fought to set up that committee because there was no committee that looked at the condition of our families and our children. So, more than anything else, we were able to shine the light on our children. For example, in those years, they were very afraid – and remember, this is the '80s – they were afraid of nuclear war. Kids. And they had bad dreams

about it. I remember one of the first hearings George called was to have kids tell us their fears and their hopes. It was quite moving. And of course, later, I was able to get the first funding for after-school care when Bill Clinton was elected.

But it's all of that work I did in the early years, looking at the status of our children, and I also was able to get... I'm so... One of my proudest accomplishments actually is making sure that the standards for drinking water protect children because when I learned about what the standard was, it was to protect 155-pound men, not women like you and I, our size. Not people with AIDS, not people with disabilities, and certainly not children. So these are the things we did and so I think one of the things about getting more women into Congress was more of a focus on families.

For example, in the House, we found out women were not used in clinical trials of drugs. So let's say you were testing aspirin and could aspirin help you avoid heart attacks? By the way, that's controversial now, but then they said, oh, they did all the tests on men. So we insisted, and we did pass a Women's Health Equity act. So it's so important to have a diverse legislature, and if you don't, it's not relevant to so many people.

**CM:** You also shone a light on the military budget at the time and made headlines talking about some of the expenditures like a \$76,000 coffee pot.

**BB:** Well, \$7,600.

**CM:** \$7,600 coffee pot, and you got help from Senator Chuck Grassley at the time.

**BB:** I'll tell you about that. That was one of my best accomplishments when I was in the House. One of my staffers was just terrific, and he came to me and he said, "Do you know that the military is spending \$1,100 on a toilet seat?" And I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, they don't put out these contracts. They just say, 'Hey Joe, would you give us a million toilet seats? And what will you charge? Oh, \$1,100.'" No. There needs to be spare parts fairness and contracting out for spare parts. The coffee pot, how that came about is because whoever made the airplanes for the military were also charging \$7,600 for a little coffee pot by Mr. Coffee. And so I took on the military. That was really hard and, oh boy, people were mad. And I did get support from Chuck Grassley at the time and we passed the bill. All it said was, contract out for the spare parts. It has saved, since then, many billions of dollars. I'm so proud of that. And it's just common sense but some of those things, they were... There was a little bit of a... I used to wear it around my neck, just a little spare part that you put in the corner of a door or something. I don't even know what it was called. A hinge.

**BB:** And that hinge, they were selling it for hundreds of dollars instead of 25 cents. So I wore it around my neck, and people go, "What is that?" I'd say, "Do you know what we're spending..." "It was hysterical, and it really helped get me a bigger profile too because it made the front page of the Washington Post, me with my necklace and my charts and all of this. And so when I

ran for senate, which I... No way was it in my mind I'd ever do that, honestly, people knew me from that, it was helpful.

**CM:** Of course, many Americans came to know you for that watershed moment in your House career and that was during that 1991 Supreme Court hearing regarding Clarence Thomas during the Anita Hill hearings when you marched...

**BB:** 1991.

**CM:** 1991, I apologize.

**BB:** No, that's okay.

**CM:** You led that group of women House members up the Senate steps, that is still an iconic photograph in American political history, and so take us back to that day and that moment and what was going through your mind at the time.

**BB:** Right. Well, first, I want to give credit to Pat Schroeder even though I was faster up the steps. Pat and I really co-led that with about six women. It's so interesting, I was... When I heard about Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill on, remember radio, on the radio... On the car radio, on the way to an event on a weekend, I said, "That's the end of him, we can't have that." Anita Hill was so... What's the word I'm looking for? Believable, so authentic. So real, so smart, so accomplished, so eloquent, you can put all those words together. And so he's finished, and that's a good thing because he's a very... For me, he was so right-wing I was worried about choice, I was worried about a lot of other issues, and so I arrive in Washington to the House, this is happening in the Senate, and guess what, they're just going right ahead with the vote. They're not stopping. They're not going to hear this. They're not calling her.

So the women of the House, I explained we weren't many of us, but we divided into two groups, part of them stayed in the House to discuss this on the floor of the House, and part of... Some of us marched over and the purpose of the march was to meet with George Mitchell, who was the leader of the Democrats there and said, what are you thinking? And it was a Tuesday, and it was a lunch time, and they were all having lunch together, each conference, the Republican conference, the Democrat, well, we were just going after the Democratic conference, because Joe Biden chaired the committee. We wanted just to go in to the conference and talk to them and tell them, what are you doing? So we got up to the steps, top of the steps, honestly, we get to the door behind which all the Democrats are having this. We knock on the door, like that [knocks], and a woman comes out and she says, "Who are you?" She says to all of us, and we say, "We're Congress women, we're very concerned, and we want to meet with the Senators," she said, "You can't do that. We don't let strangers in the Senate."

Now, my first book was called Strangers in the Senate. We said, "We're not strangers we're your colleagues." And she said, "Oh, it's just a term of art. Anyone who's not a senator is a stranger," which she made that up, later, she admitted to me. She apologized, but she was

desperate. She made up a rule, we don't let strangers in the senate. So now we said, "We have to talk to George Mitchell." So finally he came out.

**CM:** Yeah.

**BB:** And we said, Mr. Leader, if you don't stop this train wreck, we're going to go down and then tell the press, and we're going to just say... And he said, "Alright, alright. We'll have hearings." So the rest is history. They had hearings. It didn't help a bit. It was awful.

**CM:** Do you believe today that Clarence Thomas committed perjury and lied about under oath about his interest in pornography and sexual harassment?

**BB:** Look, I'm not going to say, because I don't know how he worded what he said, he could have just said, "I'm not discussing that," in which case he didn't commit. So I can't say it.

But let me just put this way, I believe Anita Hill, I believe Anita Hill to this day, many years later, Anita Hill got a crazy call from Clarence Thomas's his wife, she left a terrible horrifying message on her phone like, "take back what you said about my husband." Anita Hill called the FBI and the FBI visited Ginni Thomas and said, lay off. Oh, it's awful. And now we're seeing what he's doing to women, how he, in my opinion, you cannot say the things he said and do the things he's done without a real dislike of women. Without looking at women like we're a lesser being, because I don't see him saying men have to come to us before they get a vasectomy. You know, please.

**CM:** And I mean given where American women are today when you look back at it, do you think that your protest walking up the Senate, had a lasting effect?

**BB:** Well let me put it this way. If you look at society today, compared to where it was when I walked up the steps, how many women are in the House, how many women are in the Senate, how many women are in leadership, it's still not where it should be, but it is way better than it was. It's not where it should be, but it's way better than it was. We're still fighting for women in sports. We have made progress, but I have to say, just bring it up to the present moment. When there are groups of people who want to take away a woman's right to choose and control her life, it's not about abortion, it's about controlling someone's life. And when they have children and if they should have children, and who decides that. You take away a right from a woman that should be her own business with her own God and her own doctor and her own family and whoever she wants to talk to, and you give it to Lindsey Graham and Mitch McConnell, and I don't care who it is. That's wrong. And so for all of the progress, and yes, we have made progress and we did pass the Violence Against Women Act, and we have renewed it all the time, things are getting better, things are not where they should be, it's a constant battle.

**CM:** But the ERA which you worked for back then...

**BB:** Yeah.

**CM:** Is still not passed.

[laughter]

**BB:** Well, the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution needs to be ratified. We came very close to doing it and we didn't get it done, and all it says is women are equal in the Constitution. And the Republicans have used as their excuse not to vote for it, it will give women the automatic right to an abortion. And we said, "Hey, if that's an issue, we can deal with that in the legislation." They don't care. They don't want equal rights for women, and it's about time people wake up and smell the roses.

**BB:** But we are now reaping the anger of the right wing and the power of the right wing. And as we talk right now, I'm still hopeful that they went so far that if you can say in Kansas, "We're not going that far," that's a good thing. But there's a song which I will not sing, even though I already did sing on this tape, there is a song from way back when in the 1930s, when the words are, freedom, freedom is a hard one thing, you have to work for it, fight for it, day and night for it, and every generation's got to do it again. So if I have any message for people watching, who care about this country, and we all do, nothing is a given. Nothing. You have to fight for it. It's not guaranteed. And it's a moving thing. And nothing's guaranteed, not the democracy, not the freedom, not the equality, not the fairness, not the justice. It's this constant battle. On the one hand, that can make you depressed and say, "Well, after all these years and Barbara Boxer, you fought for this, that and the others." No, don't let it make you depressed, it makes... Keep on at it. As long as I have a breath and a brain, I'm keeping at it, because it's a constant struggle. And if I want my grandkids and your grandkids to have any kind of life, we have to save the planet, and we have to fight for democracy. These are the things that you have to do, and it goes on and on, the struggle.