

RELEASE IN FULL

Purple Nation

December 19, 2012

"Farewell to Secretary Clinton - Public Servant and Friend"

By Lanny J. Davis

The fact that she may be the most popular Secretary of State in U.S. history is no surprise. All the qualities that made her so successful are familiar to those of us who have known her for a long time: always working hard, sensitive to others, smart, seeing the big picture, great people skills.

Memories...

September 1969. I first met Hillary Rodham when I was a third-year student at Yale Law School, registering for classes, and she was behind me in line. I recognized her, since I had recently seen her photo in a national magazine story about her Valedictorian Speech at Wellesley College about the legacy of the 1960s. Within five minutes she had asked me where the nearest legal clinic for the poor was in New Haven. Five minutes later I had made up my mind. One day she would be the first female president of the United States or at least United States Senator. Almost everyone who knew her back then had the same first reaction.

Fast forward to October 1997: My mom, frail from growing indications of heart failure, visited me at the White House so I could introduce her to her hero, Hillary. I had her repeat after me as we walked to the residence: "Hello Mrs. Clinton, nice to meet you Mrs. Clinton, good-bye Mrs. Clinton" - nothing more. When the First Lady walked into the room wearing a bright yellow pantsuit, she said, "Hello Mrs. Clinton." But then she said: "Didn't you wear that suit on Larry King's show last week?" I gasped. Mom put her hand over her mouth and looked at me, anxiously, knowing she had gone off-script.

Hillary burst out laughing – that wonderful Hillary belly-laugh that has made all her friends laugh with her through the years without actually knowing what they were laughing at. "Yes, Fran, I did. You are very observant!" Mom joined her in laughter – visibly relieved.

January 2003: Newly elected South Carolina Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, formerly the key Republican floor manager on impeachment, whom I had come to know during our many TV debates on the impeachment issue, called me to ask me whether he should approach Senator Clinton to try to work together. Of course, I said.

Months later, I was not surprised that Senator Graham and Senator Clinton had worked together on the Senate Armed Services Committee to sponsor expanded health care benefits for National Guard and Reserve members. Nor was I surprised when the late Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia praised her as a “work horse, not a show horse.”

Jan 2009 – 2012: As Secretary of State, she traveled to 112 countries and transformed the way America conducts diplomacy and development – with historic focus on linking women’s rights around the world to U.S. national security interests. She took full responsibility for the failures in the State Department that led to the tragic death of the U.S. Ambassador and three other Americans. The Accountability Review Board on Tuesday night completed its investigation, found systematic management failures at the department, and made 29 recommendations to improve embassy security. Secretary Clinton accepted them all. In my view, that terrible tragedy does not mar her outstanding performance as Secretary.

When Hillary Rodham Clinton leaves office some time in the near future, it will be time for her to rest. Watch the real estate/home development show, "Love It or List It" on HGTV, whenever she wants to – no scheduler to tell her what to do. She will have time to think; enjoy, love and support her husband and family, as she always has done as her first priority in her life; for awhile, I hope, do nothing but relax.

But that won’t last. I don’t know whether she will ever run for public office again. But I do know one thing. She will resume an active life doing the public good, doing public service, impacting the world around her to teach and help others less fortunate than she, somehow, somewhere.

For that is who she is. And that is who she always will be.

#

Davis, the principal in the Washington law firm of Lanny J. Davis & Associates, which specializes in legal crisis management, served as President Clinton’s special counsel (1996-98) and as a member of President George W. Bush’s Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board (2006-07). He currently serves as special counsel to Dilworth Paxson and is a partner with former Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele in Purple Nation Solutions, a public affairs-strategic communications company. He is the author of the forthcoming book Crisis Tales – Five Rules for Handling Scandal in Business, Politics and Life, to be published by Simon & Schuster. He can be followed on Twitter @LannyDavis.