

Celebrating the life and legacy of Jeane Kirkpatrick

by Jack Kemp

I'm writing this column with a very heavy heart at the passing on the night of Dec. 7 of one of America's greatest and most brilliant diplomats, my colleague and friend, former Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick. Indeed Monday of this week was a memorial service at our Presbyterian church in which I was privileged to give a eulogy.

By the way, this is my first column after a 2 1/2 month hiatus as I recover from radical knee replacement surgery.

Jeane Kirkpatrick was a neighbor, co-founder - along with former Rep. Vin Weber, Secretary Bill Bennett and Michael Novak - of "our think tank," Empower America (though Jeane was a one person "think tank"). Empower America sought to combine Jeane's foreign policy and pro-defense ideas with our pro-growth, low-tax and free-trade ideas, all of which were championed by President Ronald Reagan so successfully in the '80s.

Jeane was not a traditional "conservative Republican", actually she was a "liberal Democrat," in the 18th century definition of the word. She was a Harry Truman, Hubert H. Humphrey, "Scoop" Jackson Democrat, and authored one of the most controversial but influential articles of the late '70s titled, "Dictatorship and Double Standards" for Commentary Magazine.

Ronald Reagan, candidate for president, read Jeane's article and reached out to her through journalist George Will. When elected, Ronald Reagan made Jeane the first woman ambassador to the United Nations in history and one of Reagan's proudest and most successful appointments.

She and Reagan were of the view that history was not some Hegelian, dialectical, inevitability, but a living, human course of events that could be influenced, shaped and moved by men and women of conviction, courage and determination.

Jeane saw the old Soviet Union not just as an evil empire but as an inhumane experiment in totalitarianism that would - given western economic, military and moral strength - wither away and die out. Indeed, she helped inspire President Reagan to say at Notre Dame in 1981 that, "the west would not contain communism, but transcend it. We would not denounce it but dismiss it as a sad and bizarre chapter of history whose last pages are now being written." How very true!

Her influence on others and me in the Congress on both sides of the aisle in the late '70s and early '80s was huge. She was not content to play defense on the world stage, but believed America should be on the offense

by expanding freedom, democracy, trade and open markets as the answer to state ownership and control of communist and socialist countries.

From Joe Lieberman and Steve Solarz on the "center left" to those of us on the "center right", we saw Jeane as the Margaret Thatcher of the U.S. Indeed, I introduced her at many political and social events in Washington, D.C., and around the country in those words. Then I'd pause and say, "no, Margaret Thatcher is the Jeane Kirkpatrick of the U.K." She'd smile, chuckle and then chide me for my hyperbole, but I still believe it.

She came onto the Reagan "team" at exactly the right time in history. In 1978, Karol Wojtyla became the first Polish Pope, John Paul II, Mrs. Thatcher was elected prime minister of the U.K. and then Reagan won in 1980 and within a decade the Cold War ended without a shot being fired!

Jeane was a wife, mother, scholar, diplomat and professor who could walk with presidents and royalty but never lose her humility, her humanness and especially her sense of humor.

For the last 25 years she'd come to our home in Bethesda, Md., for dinners or barbecues after church on Sunday and talk with my children about their schoolwork, their questions about foreign policy or just their sports and social activities.

She and I were part of the early "neoconservative" cause led by Irving Kristol, Michael Novak and the late Robert Bartley, The Wall Street Journal's editorial page editor.

Both Jeane and I questioned the "rush to war," but to make that concession does not mean we accept the premise of the Left - that we can walk away without leaving a state of anarchy that would only be filled by Iran and al-Qaida.

She was a profound thinker, speaker and scholar whose place in history is reflected in her many awards, accolades and tributes from both sides of the political aisle and from all over the world.

Andre Sakharov, the great Russian physicist, called her "Mrs. Kirkpatrick" and told her every Soviet dissident and refusenik knew her name in every cell of the Gulag.

Joking with her before she passed away I told her I'd campaigned for Joe Lieberman in Connecticut during the last week of his race for Senate. Then I told her, "and guess what Jeane, Lieberman won anyway." She

laughed and then said "Scoop" Jackson, (one of my heroes) would have been proud of me.

The world is a better place and America is a better nation because of Jeane Kirkpatrick and all of us old and young, Democrat and Republican, conservative and liberal are in her debt as we mourn her passing but celebrate her life, her legacy and her many achievements in service to our country and the free world.

Â© Copley News Service

Celebrating the life and legacy of Jeane Kirkpatrick by Jack Kemp