



Alex Wong, Getty Images News

THE AURA OF JENNIFER DUNN

A BIOGRAPHY OF WASHINGTON'S DYNAMIC CONGRESSWOMAN

THE WASHINGTON STATE
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LEGACY PROJECT

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The Aura of Jennifer Dunn

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Dunn, then co-chair of the Iraqi Women's Caucus talks with Dr. Shifa Hadi Hussain Ali al-Haumdani during Hussain's first excursion outside of Iraq. *Alex Wong, Getty Images.*

There is a photograph that says it all. The late Washington Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn rests an arm on the shoulder of an Iraqi woman who “risked her life” coming to America. The woman, presumably a perfect stranger until that day, hands Dunn what may be her single most valuable possession. That poignant moment in 2004, as a “New Iraq” struggles to emerge, captures the essence of Jennifer Dunn.

December 12, 2003, the fall of Saddam

With orders to “kill or capture,” Operation Red Dawn led U.S. forces across volatile land of the Middle East, rich in oil and scarred by violence. Following intelligence tips, they trailed the enemy in total darkness to a rural farmhouse in the village of ad-Dawr.

In a swift raid, troops discovered Hussein – one of history’s most ruthless dictators – in a makeshift cellar roughly eight feet underground. It was twelve days before Christmas in 2003. Authorities had finally ousted Saddam Hussein – in a scraggly beard and dirty clothing. His modest living quarters, a far cry from the extravagant palaces to which he’d long been accustomed, consisted of a disorderly single room with a couple of beds and two pairs of shoes. “Our military tour guide tried hard – with little success – not to gloat,” recalled cameraman Chris Hondros, who traveled to the hideout the day after the capture.

The U.S. finally had in its clenches one of the world’s most



“We got him!” It was the soundbite heard around the world when a fallen dictator emerged from his much reported spider hole. *U.S. Army photo.*

sought-after enemies – a man the State Department linked to kidnapping, torture and gruesome murders. In its 2003 special report, details are horrific. Najat Mohammad Haydar, a Baghdad obstetrician, “was beheaded after criticizing the corruption within health services.” All told, the State Department reported 200 such crimes carried out in public. In 1990, Hussein introduced Article 111 into the Iraqi Penal Code, added the State Department. “This law exempts men who kill their female relatives in defense of their family’s honor from prosecution and punishment,” it reported.

Hussein’s undoing took place near his hometown of Tikrit where he was born the son of peasants on April 28, 1937. America dragged the disheveled, harried ruler into captivity “like a rat” CNN reported, and away from more than 30 years of power. “My name is Saddam Hussein. I am the President of Iraq and I want to negotiate,” reported media outlets of the embattled dictator’s first words upon capture.

The historic event could be felt around the globe. From the nation’s capital, a seasoned congresswoman at the top of her game called the moment a turning point for millions of Iraqis. “Mothers see a future for their children with open access to unbiased education and modern medical treatment,” declared 8th District Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn. Dunn, a proven commodity in Washington politics, was widely recognized as an advocate for women.

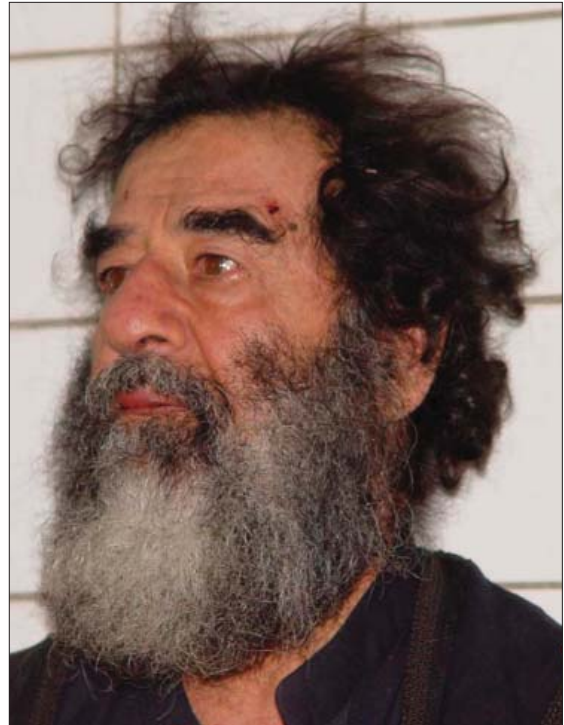
“These same mothers are witnessing the emergence of a new economy, one where they can seek employment and earn important wages to help support their families,” said Dunn. “The coalition forces and the people of Iraq still face a long and potentially difficult road in rebuilding a nation that was devastated for decades under the oppressive rule of Saddam.”

That they did. The quest to liberate Iraq rolled forward in waves of marked progress and deep setbacks.

The ring

Within months of the capture, a delegation of Iraqi women traveled to the U.S. “They risked their lives coming to America,” declared Charlotte (Charlie) Ponticelli. “They had been suppressed, oppressed, repressed, and their stories made your skin crawl.

“Going through this notebook yesterday brought back so much. And not just



With Saddam Hussein in custody, a world away Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn prepared for the “New Iraq” and a visible role helping women. *Department of Defense photo.*

tragedy, I want to say, but hope, and courage, and determination, and the linking up with the women of the United States of America, and Jennifer Dunn's leadership. It's why the contribution that Jennifer Dunn made is of incalculable importance."

On March 10, 2004, Washington's power-wielding Congresswoman, waited in the wings at the Capitol in a polished gray-and-white suit jacket, classic gold earrings, and a red corsage. As always, she looked the part and was well prepared to greet an entourage of roughly 15 women from Iraq—a mix of Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds.

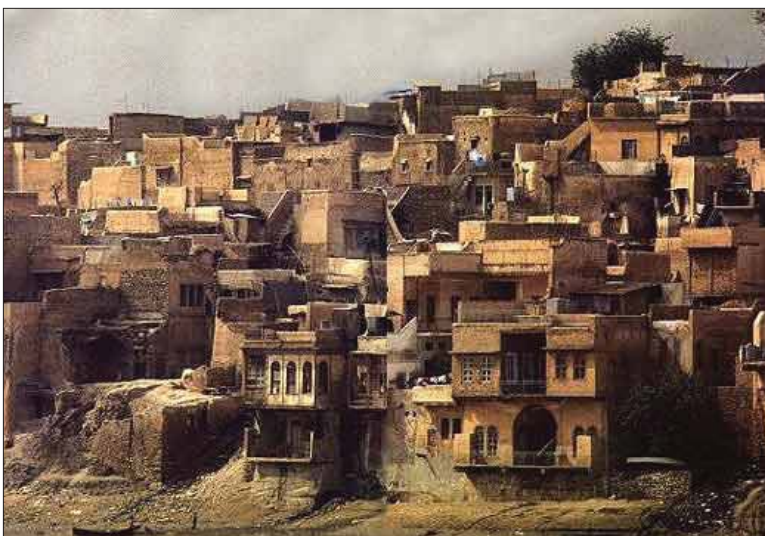
The trip marked an important time period for Iraq. On March 8, the country's interim constitution was signed, establishing the rule of law. When the delegates arrived in the United States, they were filled with hope and determined to live among the free in a New Iraq—liberated once and for all from the viselike grip of Saddam Hussein.

"We were busy trying to lobby for women's rights and lobby for women to have 25-percent representation in the government," recalled Zainab Al-Suwaij of the efforts in Iraq. Al-Suwaij took part in the delegation and co-founded the American Islamic Congress in 2001. Like all delegates, she too has a story. Al-Suwaij was one of just a few women who engaged in a 1991 uprising against Hussein that temporarily sent her into hiding. Born in 1971, Al-Suwaij survived the Iran-Iraq War, the invasion of Kuwait, and the Persian Gulf War. And she wasn't alone.



Zainab Al-Suwaij.
American Islamic Congress photo.

Shifa Hadi Hussain, or "Dr. Shifa" as she was commonly called, arrived in America that week on her first excursion ever outside her home country. The youthful, attractive Iraqi was a native of Mosul, one of the country's most violent cities. Dr. Shifa was no stranger to Iraq's painful history. But she'd made a life in Mosul, teaching English at Mosul University and raising two kids with her husband. That week in the U.S., Dr. Shifa spoke freely.



Mosul, a tumultuous city with a dark past, is home to Dr. Shifa, the Iraqi woman who encountered Dunn.

"I would like you just to feel the sense of sadness and sorrow that the Iraqi people are practicing now because of the security situations... I would like you to feel the sorrow of those people in Iraq who cannot, for example, just wake up to see that they are living or not. It's—to live there by chance, because... international terrorism is a problem. And to awake to see that you are still alive it's a kind of chance that you are getting Iraq.



An Iraqi woman looks on with the U.S. presence in the war-torn land at her doorstep.
Staff Sgt. Jason Robertson, U.S. Air Force photo.

“Iraqi women have been the victims of the three wars and prisoners in their country for 35 years. I think it’s the time to start living from this moment, starting getting outside Iraq and starting with meeting in the world outside. I would like just to ask the whole world to give a hand to Iraq to just to stand on its feet.”

Harrowing stories came from all the women. But it was Dr. Shifa who personally reached out to Dunn, then the co-chair of the Iraqi Women’s Caucus with colleague Tom Osborne, a U.S. Representative from Nebraska. The group was instructed to lend support to Iraqi women transitioning to a new and democratic Iraq.

In a desperate plea for help, Dr. Shifa turned to Dunn and expressed her fear that U.S. involvement in the country would be short-lived. Despite Dunn’s assurances, Dr. Shifa handed her a most treasured possession.

“She took a ring off her finger,” recalled Dunn. “And she said, ‘I have a grant that is helping me train women to be security officers. And we’re all very, very worried that the grant is going to run out, and that after the Iraqi elections you’re going to forget us and leave.’

“I said, ‘We’re not going to do that. We’re not there to occupy you. We’re there to train you and do what we can to help you run your own country. But we will always be involved in things that we believe are important. And training women to have jobs is important.’ And so I said, ‘But I don’t want to take your ring.’ It was a really pretty gold kind of filigree ring.”

Stunned that Dr. Shifa had offered her such a prized piece of jewelry, Dunn politely explained that Members of the United States Congress cannot accept gifts.

“And she said, ‘No. You must take it. It will remind you.’” Dunn recounted. “Finally, after five minutes of this, she had tears in her eyes. I mean, it was a big deal. Because, we were the ones that could make sure they could go on with this. And I said, ‘Okay, let me

take this ring.’ And she said, ‘My husband gave it to me.’ And I said, ‘this is your wedding ring?’ So then I had the tears coming down my face. And so then I was really going to make sure that that grant continued.”

As it turned out, loaning her wedding ring proved an effective tactic. The borrowed piece of jewelry weighed heavily on the Congresswoman. For six months, her staff and the State Department corresponded with Americans on the ground in Iraq to ensure that even in the midst of turmoil, Dr. Shifa’s requests had been met.

“I recently learned that several U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) grants have enabled a new Center for Iraqi Women to open its doors in Mosul,” remarked Dunn happily months later. “It is now offering counseling on women’s health issues, business advice, employment and political training, and social and family services.”

USAID confirmed it invested \$10,000 to launch the Mosul Women’s Center and another \$23,000 to continue operations there after its name changed to the Iraqi Women’s Center.

“Jennifer proudly wore that ring and then gave it back,” says Keith Thomson, Dunn’s widower, admiring his wife’s “personal and emotional commitment to helping people.”

The week in the U.S. produced tangible results. After the delegates returned home to the New Iraq, Al-Suwaij reported that eight ran for office, and three or four became senior government officials.

Dr. Shifa herself ran and won a seat on the Mosul City Council. Sadly, like many women who exercised newfound freedoms in Iraq, Dr. Shifa faced grave danger. Years later, Al-Suwaij learned of an attempt on Dr. Shifa’s life and could not reach her through a mutual friend. “The situation in Mosul was very bad,” she explained. “It has improved, but not much. I know that Dr. Shifa – they tried to assassinate her.”



A typical women’s center in Iraq. Thomas Hartwell, USAID photo.



A new world is at the fingertips of Iraqi women in the “New Iraq” after Saddam. Thomas Hartwell, USAID photo.



The portrait of a humanitarian. Fern Holland, 1970-2004. USAID photo.

Fresh injustices came to light that very same week in March, 2004 illuminating the complex world that impassioned Dunn. One day after the constitution was signed and sealed, came a powerful reminder that terror continues and carries a price. One of the constitution writers, American activist Fern Holland, died in an ambush on the ground in Iraq. From all accounts, the plight of the Iraqis consumed Holland. Of all her achievements, she was perhaps most proud of the women's center in Hilla. Its sole purpose was to give the women of Iraq a new beginning and a new life. If the center changed a vast number of lives, Holland would never know. Bullets rained down across the windshield of her car on a stretch of rural

road outside Hilla. Three people lost their lives. "If I die, know that I'm doing precisely what I want to be doing," Holland had relayed to friends and colleagues in an apparent premonition of the danger.

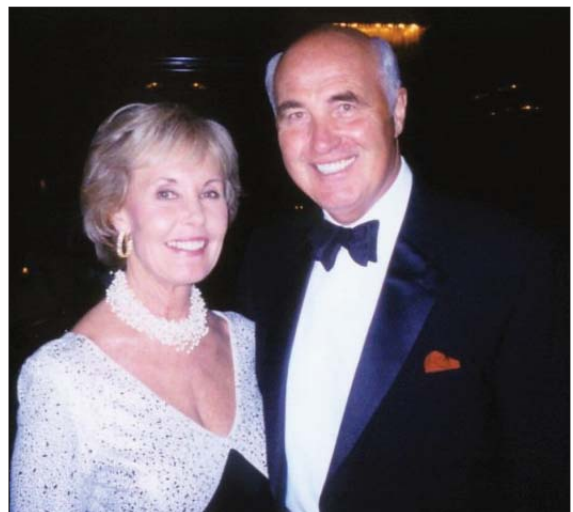
The crusade toward a new and stable Iraq marched on in 2004 and found the Washington congresswoman optimistic. "The people of Iraq are finally free and have control over their destiny," Dunn remarked. "After decades of repression and government-sponsored torture and abuse, Iraqi women now have access to educational and professional opportunities. And they are fully embracing the new small business owners opportunities by taking jobs as government officials, educators, police and security guards, and engineers. The new constitution also includes a provision calling for a target of 25 percent representation for women in the forthcoming transitional national assembly."

In six terms of Congress, Dunn's passion for women's rights never waned.

Jennifer, a voice for women

"Jennifer came from salt-of-the-Earth people," Keith Thomson offers quietly on the character of the woman he married in 2003. He vacillates between intense emotion and awe as he describes his great love. "She was the woman I'd been looking for my whole life."

By all accounts, the feeling was mutual between Dunn and Thomson. The late Congresswoman's family likens Thomson to British film star Sean Connery, whose portrayal of secret agent James Bond is legendary. Thomson is nothing if not distinguished. His tall and sturdy frame is softened by his charming personality, his



"Jenny and Keith," writes husband Thomson on many of the images documenting their life together. Keith Thomson photo.

refreshing sincerity, and his British accent. Like his late wife, Thomson speaks thoughtfully and with ease.

For all of their globetrotting, political engagements, and esteemed friends, Thomson met Dunn for the first time on a blind date at one of her Washington D.C. haunts. “And as they say, the rest was history,” he recalled of that first fateful encounter. Their whirlwind courtship led to a blissful marriage cut painfully short. For Thomson, the world changed profoundly on Labor Day weekend in 2007. But reminiscent of his late wife, he handles himself with an enviable grace. Thomson, in fact, remains inspired by his good fortune in meeting her at all. “She was an extraordinary, extraordinary human being and I was just privileged to know her. She was enormously emotionally involved in helping people, helping women particularly.”

“She was driven with her goals and desire to accomplish something of value in this world,” says first husband, Dennis Dunn.

The late Congresswoman may also have also been driven to advocate for women by her own experiences. Twice, in 1984 and in 1990, Dunn was named a U.S. appointee to the



In 1984 and 1990, Dunn attended the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. *Dunn family photo.*

United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, a global summit dedicated to gender equality around the globe.

Dunn’s own political career likely played a role in her advocacy for women. After all, Dunn didn’t break just one glass ceiling, she shattered many. At a time when the wrong gender threatened to end political careers before they began, Dunn embraced her womanhood.

Perhaps more importantly, she called

on every Republican to open the party tent and follow suit.

From those first moments in the political sphere, Dunn was unabashedly a single mother. Her first spouse Dennis Dunn once introduced her to the Republican National Committee. “I said, ‘Now, for those of you on the RNC and implying towards theories of conspiratorial politics, I want you to know that I don’t have any more control over this woman than I did when I was married to her.’ And everybody burst out laughing.”

“I know what it’s like to have that knot in your stomach,” Dunn revealed in a more serious tone, addressing the numerous obstacles thrust in the path of single parents. Dunn didn’t just identify with single mothers caught in a perpetual rat race. She lived the life and told them so during the most visible speech of her political career, the 1999 Republican Response to the State of the Union Address.

It was not always a bed of roses. From the first day on the job and until she retired, Dunn fought the Good Old Boys Club, says her family. Now and then, Dunn appeared to be resented for her beauty. *New York Magazine* dubbed her “GOP’s new glamour girl” in 1997. In a cartoon, Dunn bears a striking resemblance to actress Michelle Pfeiffer who seductively sang at piano bars in *The Fabulous Baker Boys*. While Dunn is perched on an elephant, a matronly woman, presumably a less desirable political colleague, follows from behind with a broom.

As a human being, she had her limits. Dunn never spent much time in the kitchen. Dennis Dunn recalls a sticker on the stove rebelling against housework.

Dunn disliked friction, adds her first husband, but her role as a peacemaker served her well. “She was able to create enough good will with her personal qualities so that others who were diametrically opposed to her on philosophical grounds still liked her personally and were willing to cut her a lot of slack and not rely on her as a hard-core ideologue.”

The most famous ancestor: “He had a tongue so sharp it nearly cost him his life.”

Trace the Dunn family lineage back generations and you land on an outspoken patriarch by the name of Samuel Gorton, founder of the American branch of the Gorton family. Hardly one to conceal his opinion, Gorton’s life played out noisily in a myriad of religious disputes. Eventually, his unorthodox thinking and blunt talk got him exiled from Massachusetts, thrown in jail, and publicly whipped. Many accounts describe him as a noble character, calling Gorton a kind of religious freedom fighter, a champion of Native Americans, as well as “a good husband, a good farmer, and a faithful friend.”



Church of St. Mary Magdalene on Old Fish Street in London. Sara Douglass Enterprises photo.

The story of Samuel Gorton begins in Manchester, England circa 1592. Thomas and Anne Gorton welcomed son Samuel into the world. In the well-to-do family, the young boy benefited from private tutors. He became fluent in Hebrew and Greek, as well as an avid student of the Bible. Radical viewpoints on religion formed and a lay preacher was born.

On May 20, 1628, the tall and lean Gorton married Mary Maplet at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene on Old Fish Street in London. His planned future as a clothier fell by the wayside. In 1636, he boarded the *Speedwell* with his wife, the first three of their nine kids, and set sail for a new life of religious freedom. In Boston, Gorton found bitterness and hostility, and fled to Plymouth. There he boycotted the parish service in favor of his own sermons delivered

from home for all who would listen. He preached like no one in New England, said author William Gerald McLoughlin in *Rhode Island, a History*.

Gorton believed all citizens could preach, even women. He denied that “heaven and hell were states of the soul following death.” Instead, “God, he said, rewards or punishes us daily by his spiritual presence or absence from our hearts.”

In 1638, a middle-aged Gorton rushed to the defense of his maid, showing up in a Plymouth court room and reading from Scripture to declare her innocence. Gorton’s servant apparently faced charges for smiling in church and getting under the skin of the pastor. Gorton’s dramatic objections to the charge did not sit well with the court. Authorities ordered him out of Plymouth.

Gorton did not fare much better in Aquidneck where he was thrown in jail and whipped in front of a crowd “for insulting the clergy and magistrates”.

In 1642, Gorton bought land in an historic and controversial transaction known as the Shawomet Purchase. He was jailed in 1643 and then freed by the Earl of Warwick. In 1648, the land was renamed Warwick.

“He was a real rebel and a hell raiser,” sums up former U.S. Senator Slade Gorton candidly from his office in Seattle. Jennifer Dunn was not Gorton’s only descendant in Washington politics. So too was her key political ally and friend, longtime U.S. Senator Slade Gorton.

“The fact is this,” acknowledges Dunn’s youngest son Reagan, named after the former president. “Slade and my mom are sixth cousins – whatever that means; that’s getting pretty far out there. My grandmother’s maiden name is Gorton, Helen Gorton.”

According to the genealogy work of Washingtonian Rita Jean Butterworth, a distant cousin of Slade Gorton’s, the Senator and the Congresswoman are actually tenth cousins, once removed. Butterworth discovered connections between a host of politicians including former Governor and U.S. Senator Dan Evans, former Secretary of State and presidential appointee Bruce Chapman and the late 8th District Congresswoman, Jennifer Dunn.

“Every person named Gorton in the U.S. is decanted from a Samuel Gorton who came to the Colonies in the 1630’s or something like that,” explained Slade Gorton. “He left England at the beginning of The Civil War under Charles I. But he was decanted in Massachusetts.”

They may not be closely related. But similarities between Slade Gorton and Jennifer Dunn caught the attention of the public and the media. “David Horsey (cartoonist) will tell you that when he drew Slade, he would just think of my mom and then take away the hair, and vice versa,” says Reagan. “When he drew my mom, he would draw Slade and then add a bunch of hair because they had the same sort of bone structure and eyes and everything.”



The legendary Samuel Gorton.

"I was always very flattered when that came up," recalled Gorton. "By the time I was running for the Senate, the second time around in 1988, when she was State Chair, it was sort of a big deal. We mentioned it every time we saw one another. If we were on the same stage, we'd say that and someone would say, 'Well, you look alike.' And I would say, 'That is very flattering.'"

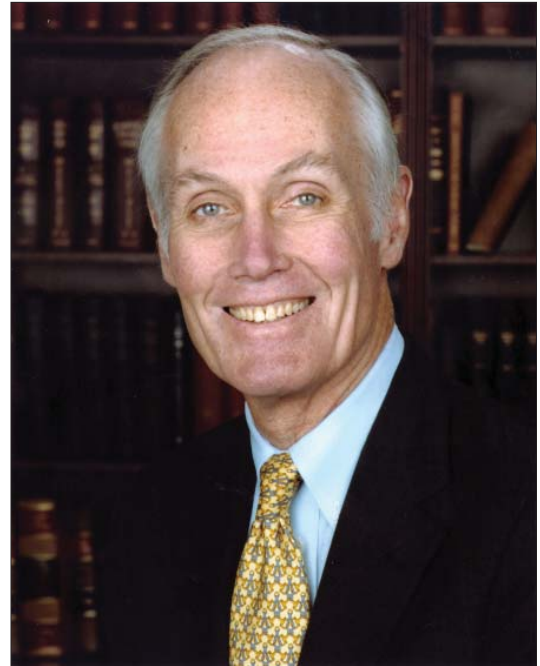
Over the years, Gorton and Dunn developed a lasting friendship. "It was a great working relationship," says Reagan. "You know, Slade was a very good Senator. He had been Attorney General. He'd been in the Legislature. He was a *very* bright person. And Mom was similar. She had those same skill sets. She was intelligent. She wasn't a bomb thrower. She was one of the last pragmatic Republicans we've had in the state. So, they worked well. You need a Senator, you need a member of the House to sponsor legislation, they worked a lot together. And to this day I think the Dunn/Gorton legacy, and employees that worked for them, have a much closer relationship than any of the other federal members, it was the last strong duo I think we've had in awhile."

The duo's shared family lineage still comes up in the political grapevine from time to time. After Samuel Gorton arrived in the colonies, the family tree produced a fascinating cast of characters. Samuel Gorton II maintained friendly relations with the Indians in keeping with his father's legacy. "He served as a member of the court at Newport for the trial of Indians who were charged with offenses during King Philip's War in 1678," noted one account.

Samuel Gorton III fathered nine children in all, one of whom he named Freelove. Samuel Gorton IV fathered 15 children: 11 with his first wife Ruth, and four with his second wife Frances. It is at this juncture that the lineage splits for the late Congresswoman and the former U.S. Senator. Among the 15 children of Samuel Gorton IV were Peleg Gorton, Jennifer Dunn's great, great, great, great grandfather and Slade Gorton, the great, great, great grandfather of U.S. Senator Slade Gorton.

Peleg Gorton served in the militia. The Daughters of the American Revolution started a chapter in his honor in Winfield, Kansas on December 18, 1928.

Eventually, the Gorton family journeyed west. Milo Gorton, Jennifer's grandfather fought in the Spanish-American War. For five years he worked the family farm before homesteading in North Dakota. Milo Gorton studied watch making and optics, and eventually landed in Kalispell intent on starting his own business. Instead, he found work at the Kalispell Mercantile where he remained until he retired in 1942. Milo and his wife Hazel, a teacher, had two children.



A close friend and political ally, the Dunn/Gorton relationship was renowned. "It was the last strong duo I think we've had in a while." -Reagan Dunn. *U.S. Senate photo.*

“Mother and Dad”

Between Seattle, Washington and Skagway, Alaska, rare wildlife and glacier-formed cliffs line the stunning Inside Passage. The narrow corridor snakes through breathtaking landscape and a series of coastal towns. Here, roughly 900 miles north of Seattle, rests the old fishing and logging town of Wrangell, Alaska. Fresh off *The Dollar Line*, John “Jack” Charles Blackburn, arrived ready for the next chapter life had to offer. At the time, he had no idea he was about to meet his future wife.

“Mother and Dad were risk takers,” recalled Dunn years later to C-SPAN when asked about her parents.

“Dad” was Jack Blackburn, a deeply proud Irish descendant born November 7,

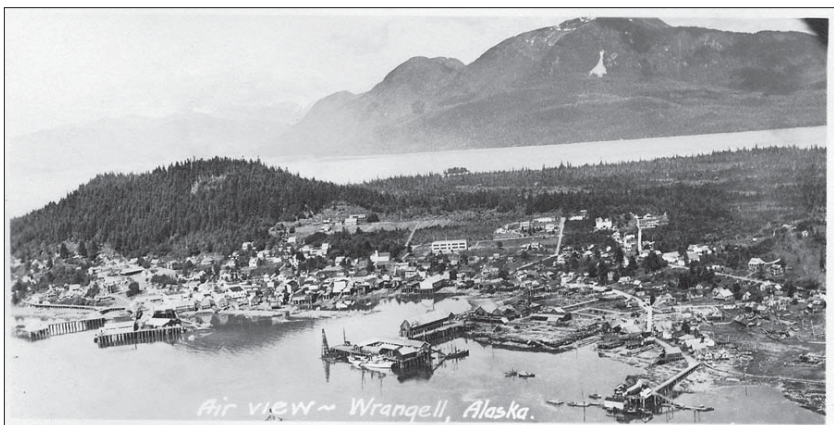


Dunn’s father, Jack Blackburn, pictured here as a high school senior, is described as gutsy and impulsive. *Garfield Arrow Yearbook, Seattle Public Schools photo.*

1911 in Alberta, Canada. When Blackburn was ten years old, he packed his bags and moved from Edmonton, Alberta to Seattle, Washington with his family. Blackburn grew up in Seattle and attended Madrona Elementary School. On September 8, 1925, he entered Garfield High School where he was elected president of the freshman class. Eventually, Blackburn enrolled at the University of Washington where he joined a fraternity.

One day, while bidding farewell to a buddy at the docks in Seattle, Jack Blackburn impulsively hopped on board himself – without so much as a word to his mother. The rash decision led him to *The Dollar Line* where he worked for several years before eventually heading north to Alaska and meeting his wife.

“She had a lot of style, a lot of elegance, very pretty brown hair,” summed up Dunn of “Mother.” Helen Gorton had a gutsy side of her own. “Mother came from Kalispell, Montana,” explained Dunn. “She had planned to go down to Berkeley, the University of California, to get some training and go out and work. And it was during The Great Depression so they didn’t have any money. She went up to Bellingham to Bellingham Normal School which is a teachers college. And the only job a single woman could get in those days was in distant places so she went up to Alaska and taught school up there.”



The rough-and-tumble world of Wrangell, Alaska and the beginning of the courtship that produced Washington Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn. *Wrangell Museum photo.*

The single Helen Gorton took a job teaching Native Americans in the rough-and-tumble world of the Territory of Alaska. She waited out a longshoremen's strike in Seattle, boarded the *SS Yukon*, and headed to Wrangell, a town well worn from the footsteps of fortune-hungry adventurers during the Klondike Gold Rush.

One night in Alaska, Helen shed some light on life deep in the thicket. Over the amateur broadcasting station W77ABT, Helen revealed the tale of a wandering polar bear as her parents eagerly listened from Montana. The bear apparently hitchhiked its way to



"Mother and Dad were risk takers," said Dunn of her parents shown on the far left and far right before they were married. *Wrangell Museum photo.*

town. The animal "drifted to shore on an ice floe in the channel," announced the local paper that picked up Helen's story. Meandering around town, the animal – that can weigh between 600 and 1200 pounds – caused quite a stir. But it was just another day in the wilds of Washington's neighbor to the north.

It was in this setting that Jack Blackburn met and fell in love with Helen Gorton. They married on May 4, 1935. "They were Republican, coming from Alaska, independent," Reagan says of his grandparents. "My grandfather was very, very bright, very bright man, born in Canada."

Blackburn earned his keep crunching numbers for Wrangell Packing Company located near the town sawmill. Of course, the salmon industry brought in big money for Alaska. In the 1920s, the industry produced and exported "millions of one-pound tins of salmon" around the world.

But it was an isolated life for the Blackburns and a hard-drinking society, reported *The Seattle Times*. "About the time they knew that I was coming along, they decided to leave Alaska and come down to Seattle," Dunn told C-SPAN. "They just decided when Grandma got pregnant that it was too rough a place... It was a rough town back then, in 1940, too rough of a place to raise children," explained Reagan.

The Blackburns packed their bags for Sitka and took jobs at the town's first publicly-traded company, the Sitka Wharf and Power Company, before moving on to Seattle.



"It was too rough a town back then," says Reagan of his grandparents' decision to leave the community. *Wrangell Packing Company. Wrangell Museum photo.*



A cherub faced Jennifer Jill Blackburn at the start of it all. *Dunn family photo.*

It was the brink of World War II, U.S. Armed Forces ratcheted up and breathed life into the sluggish Puget Sound economy devastated by The Great Depression. War contracts circulated. Women busily trained to replace men in the workforce. In the midst of it all, however, on a pleasant summer day, Helen Blackburn relished a life-changing moment all her own. She became a mother for the very first time. Jennifer Jill Blackburn took her first breath in Seattle, Washington on July 29, 1941.

“The many Sitka friends of Mr. and Mrs. John (Jack) Blackburn will be Interested to know of the birth of a daughter, Jennifer Jill, July 29th at Seattle, Washington. Both Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn were employees of the Sitka Wharf and Power Company while in Sitka,” announced the *Sitka Sentinel*.

Little more than four months later, Japanese warplanes bombed Pearl Harbor and the U.S. declared war. The Blackburn family rode out World War II in Seattle, expanding within a few years when Dunn’s younger brother

John arrived, a namesake of his father. “A son was born to Mr. and Mrs. John Charles Blackburn at the Swedish Hospital in Seattle on January 20. He has been named John Richard Franklin,” reported the *Daily Interlake* with baby news on March 4, 1944.

The Blackburn family settled in to the quintessential 1950s home life. Mother gave up her teaching career to raise Jennifer and John. An extraordinary seamstress, the handsome Helen Blackburn made stylish clothes. Hand-me-downs dazzled with flair. Long before Dunn’s wardrobe was noted for its elegance at the U.S. capitol, it caught the attention of classmates. “I was voted best-dressed... when I hardly spent anything on clothes,” Dunn said reflecting on her childhood years.



“She knocked me all over the room,” says Dunn’s younger brother John Blackburn. *Dunn family photo.*

Mother knew her way around the kitchen. She was famous for her duck with orange sauce and delightful candied apples. She “filled the home with the smell of fresh-baked bread every day and served dinner every night at the table,” Dunn once said of life with Mother.

Helen Blackburn raised money for various charities, perhaps inspiring her daughter’s volunteerism later in life. The two also shared a passion for gardening.

Mother stressed to her children the importance of traditional values, honesty, and integrity — and the words stuck. “She had very high standards for us kids and it was really important to her for us to get a good education,” said Dunn. “It was an era where you respected your teachers and parents. My brother and I really think of them as the role models in our lives.”

Of his sister, John described her as a “larger-than-life” presence who could “outbox and outfish” her baby brother. “And she knocked me all over the room. She just jumped right in and started swinging.”

Though social, Jennifer played the more serious scholar. “Everything she did was full steam ahead,” said Blackburn. The studious Dunn was athletic, rarely one for mischief, and wore her blonde hair in long braids, often



On her second birthday, Dunn probably wished for a second piece of cake as opposed to the tax relief she would later champion in Congress. *Dunn family photo.*



Pretty, polished, and put together. Jennifer Blackburn takes in a summer day with brother John. *Dunn family photo.*

showing off her feminine side. Of her remarkable success later in life, Blackburn said, “I know that she feels she’s had to fight for just about everything she got. I know that she doesn’t feel that she’s heard a lot of the time, and that bothers her. She just feels that it’s difficult to command attention sometimes, particularly in Congress.”

But growing up, the carefree kids regularly plunged into Lake Washington, one of the state’s largest natural lakes. Dunn, a self-described water baby, developed a lifelong love of swimming.

As a young girl, she trotted off to Washington Elementary School. In the first grade, many of her classmates brought money to school to start bank accounts. One day, a classmate handed his entire savings to Jennifer. “I remember being so proud of that I wanted everybody to know what he was doing so I let all the money fall to the floor,” she laughed. “It let everybody know that I was very sought after. But he ended up having to put the money in the bank.”

The seeds of politics

The Blackburn family eventually settled in Vuecrest, one of the first planned neighborhoods in the City of Bellevue touted as “Seattle’s finest suburban development”. The neighborhood sits on the historic Patrick Downey 160-acre homestead. Downey, an Irish immigrant, sold the property after World War II.

Jack Blackburn became a property developer in Bellevue, then a city of open countryside and famous strawberry fields. “He knew Bob Wallace and Kemper Freeman and those guys as they all were working to develop the Eastside,” says Reagan.

In fact, Dunn later roamed the halls of Bellevue High School with a host of up-and-coming businessmen and politicians including renowned Bellevue developer Kemper Freeman Junior, credited with reviving Bellevue Square into “one of the nation’s premier shopping malls.” “She was at Bellevue High with Skip Rowley,” added son Reagan. “She was at Bellevue High with Kemper Freeman, with Vic Parker, so a lot of folks that are well known in the community today.”

At the start of it all, when Jennifer Blackburn was first exposed to politics, she made history, albeit on the playground. “We had an election for the first student body president of Bellevue Elementary School and it turned out to be me,” said Dunn, smiling at the memory. “And I ran against my boyfriend and beat him, which felt great.”

It was hardly the last time Dunn would beat the boys in politics. Just two years after Dunn defeated her boyfriend she ran for treasurer and won. In high school, classmates elected her secretary. “Schools can do a lot for young people who have an interest in leadership,” explained Dunn. “I was one of those kids who liked studying and liked school and ran for leadership positions. And I think it’s a continuation of that sort of thing that aims you toward politics.”

“All of school was a good experience for me,” Dunn told *The Seattle Times* in later years. “I really had a great respect for authority and that was important to me then. I was an obedient type of person... so I would always do at least as much as I should have done, and usually a lot more.”

In the summer of 1958, between her junior and senior years, Dunn attended the leadership program ‘Girls State’ and the week changed her life. “First of all, there was the honor of being selected to represent your school,” Dunn recalled with great pride. While learning the makings of a democracy, kids played college student for a week and bunked together in dormitories. Dunn was even elected state senator. She heard an inspirational speech

“ I dated a whole lot, and it was very funny, because at one time I was dating four Larrys, four Jerrys and two Johns. ”

delivered by National Republican Committeewoman Janet Tourtellotte that struck a chord. The words faded with time, but not their impact. Dunn was impressed that someone of Tourtellotte’s stature made time for students. “I wish politicians



Asked what she wants to be remembered for, Dunn replied, “My six foot pink feather boa and my silky black tresses.” *Bellevue High School Yearbook, Bellevue School District photo.*

would realize that a lot of times, people don't remember exactly what you say, but they care a lot that you care about them."

At the encouragement of her parents, Jennifer Blackburn enrolled at one of the most prestigious colleges in the nation when she graduated from high school in 1959. With just one B on her transcript, the studious and hardworking Dunn made the grades.

The move south to Stanford would prove jarring for any student, but Dunn appeared especially uncomfortable with campus drinking. Socially, however, she branched out.

"I dated a whole lot, and it was very funny, because at one time I was dating four Larrys, four Jerrys and two Johns. And I didn't know who I was talking to. I would make a date with someone and I wouldn't know who it was. I didn't know who was going to show up. I was embarrassed to ask for his last name."

From 1960 through 1962, Jennifer Blackburn transferred to the University of Washington and joined the Gamma Phi Sorority. Her academic career at the University of Washington was short-lived, however. Dunn moved back to Stanford.

In 1963, Dunn made good on a promise to see Europe even "if I have to swim." She ventured abroad to Florence, Italy billed as "one of the most beautiful cities in the world." Dunn and 80 classmates at Stanford immersed themselves in the culture. When the courses finished, she was nearly fluent in Italian and opted to stay.

She took a job teaching English to an Italian boy and lived with his family just outside the city. "They didn't speak any English at all and I tell you, talk about feeling isolated," recalled Dunn. "The family that I lived with was very particular about my not going out on my own ever. I had to be chaperoned if I wanted to go out with one of the Italian boys for a cup of coffee."

When the boy attended school, Dunn rode into town. "I actually went to rallies – political rallies," Dunn told C-SPAN. "I remember going to a Communist Party rally. I'll tell you it teaches you something about the system. They have a coalition government there. They've had several dozen elected administrations since World War II. They turn over all of the time."

Back home, the Blackburns were moving on. They put Dunn's childhood home on the market and built a new house on the south side of Bellevue. Ties to her childhood unraveled.

"Big Blue"

For Dunn, a new chapter began when she took her first job with IBM as a systems analyst in 1964. Far from the life she would one day lead, the twenty-something Stanford grad and future congresswoman could be found peddling a cumbersome computer panel and courting CEOs. The experience turned out to be Dunn's first go-around selling mind-boggling material to a critical audience.

"It was in the days where you had wired panel programming," explained Dunn. "So, I would walk around with this heavy, huge computer panel with the massive wires that nobody else could understand. I would teach CEOs what they could get from computers."

“ A woman like that who grows up and goes to Stanford isn't just going to go home and have children. ”

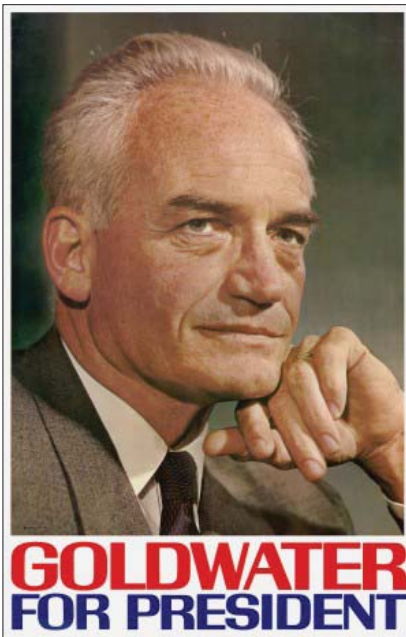
- Former U.S. Senator Slade Gorton

“Back then, IBM had a very lengthy aptitude examination they gave,” mentioned Reagan. “And she scored very, very high on it. So they fit her into the box of an IBM systems engineer. So, out of Stanford that's what she was doing, working for Big Blue, and had a strong aptitude for it.”

“A woman like that who grows up and goes to Stanford isn't just going to go home and have children,” expressed former U.S. Senator Slade Gorton. “She was fortunate that she was just young enough so that was a real possibility. Had she been a generation older most of those avenues probably would not have been available to her.”

“Mr. Conservative”

The next year, Jennifer Jill Blackburn cast her first vote for an American president. On the ticket were “Mr. Conservative” – Republican and U.S. Senator Barry Goldwater – and Democrat Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson began his service in the White House as the country mourned the loss President John F. Kennedy, murdered by an assassin in Texas.



“He was riveting,” says Dunn of Goldwater, the first American presidential candidate who won her vote.

“You can go along with Lyndon Johnson and fear, appeasement and socialism. Or you can take your stand with Barry Goldwater... and faith and freedom,” asserted emphatic campaign treasurer Wiley T. Buchanan.

“If you have a fellow who says he's going to bury you, you don't have to hand him a shovel,” quipped Goldwater in a 1964 television interview. “I would like to think that one day an American President would say, ‘You are wrong, Mr. Khrushchev. Our grandchildren will NOT live under Communism. Your children will live under freedom.’”

“Goldwater to me was a very strong force in politics,” remarked Dunn to C-SPAN. “He was riveting. And I remember marking my ballot that year for Goldwater. ”

But critics labeled Goldwater a war-mongering extremist. His rocky campaign for Commander-in-Chief even inspired a book: *A Glorious Disaster: Barry Goldwater's Presidential Campaign and the Origins of the Conservative Movement*.

Johnson capitalized on Kennedy's popularity. “So let us tonight, each of us, all of us, rededicate ourselves to keeping burning the golden torch of promise which John Fitzgerald Kennedy set aflame. And let none of us stop to rest until we have written into the law of the

land all the suggestions that made up the John Fitzgerald Kennedy program. And then let us continue to supplement that program with the kind of laws that he would have us write.”

Johnson swept into office. In a crushing defeat of Goldwater, the 36th president carried 44 states and the District of Columbia.

Jennifer Blackburn meets Dennis Dunn

He’s described as a dashing Harvard grad and his ex-wife’s entrée into politics. “Dennis was a stud,” remarked Gorton of Dunn’s first husband. “This was a very handsome couple.”

In 1962, Jennifer Blackburn met Dennis Dunn at the World’s Fair in Seattle and within a few years the courtship led to marriage.

“He was a teacher at the time... He seemed to know what he wanted to do with his life,” said Dunn of her initial attraction. She described her first husband as “intellectual in his conservatism and that fascinated me.”

“My dad is a Harvard-educated type, very intellectual, very much a policy-driven person, and brought her into that mode of thinking,” Reagan Dunn concludes of his parents.

Born in 1940, Dennis Dunn graduated cum laude from Harvard in 1962, with a B.A. degree in Romance Languages and Literature. When they married on April 3, 1965, Jennifer Dunn was just 23.

“She had my brother Bryant Dunn, who is now 39, and a couple years after that had me,” Reagan recalls. “So, I think she took five or six years where she was a stay-at-home mom.”



Bryant Dunn, years away from his career as the owner of Smokey Mountain Outfitters, gets a smile from his younger brother. *Dunn family photo.*



The Dunn family at Christmas in 1971. *Dunn family photo.*

Dennis and Jennifer Dunn welcomed their second son Reagan into the world on May 28, 1971. He was a namesake of then-California Governor Ronald Reagan, a political hero of both Jennifer and Dennis Dunn.

“I think she saw in Ronald Reagan someone who could combine a very strong set of conservative positions with an extremely sunny and optimistic personality and attitude toward life,” suspected Gorton. “My guess is that’s what attracted her to him.”

“I think she saw him... a simple, straight forward man who believed very much in the American dream,” Keith Thomson added. “He believed very much in family.



A political hero of both Jennifer and Dennis Dunn, then-Governor Ronald Reagan made a sterling impression on the couple.
Ronald Reagan Library photo.

He believed very much in the rule of law, the rights of the individual, basic American values.”

“I think it was the convention of ’72 when they *really* started talking about him as president,” recalls Reagan. “So, the name predated that wave — and you’ll see a lot of people today named Reagan, most of them are four to six years old. And then there are a few that are in their 20s and a few less that are in their 30s. But I’m pretty much the oldest one that’s named after President Ronald Reagan that I’ve met, I haven’t met anyone older than me.”

“For me, he was the one who *really* focused me on politics and that I didn’t have to be mean spirited and cynical,” explained Dunn years later of the former president’s influence. “He was a wonderful role model. We named our son after Ronald Reagan.”

“So, what are you going to do?” Reagan pointed out. “Well, okay, I’m named after him. You’re not given any choices. Now, as fate will have it, he turned out to be a pretty darn good president, so I’m glad. He wasn’t, you know, Nixon. If my name would have been Nixon Dunn it would have been different. So maybe there is a little luck.”

And so it went. Dunn spent the early years of motherhood at home raising her two young boys.

Until the last days of her life, the Dunn boys referred to their mother’s unconditional love and support.

“I remember sitting out in the back lawn by the creek, they had a little house with a creek behind it, with the blankets laid out and doing a picnic,” Reagan recalled fondly. “And I remember someone got McDonalds soft serve ice cream and they were dripping all over our hands, and mom was running around trying to wipe our little hands off, and our little faces off, and all those things we do as kids. I have lots of memories like that — those years as a mom. For whatever reason I remember the hot summers outside, those are what stuck in my head, I don’t remember much about the winters.”

“Her love was pure, it was perfect, and it was permanent,” Bryant Dunn said of his mother at a memorial and celebration of her life.

Motherhood came naturally, acknowledged Reagan, but Dunn missed the work.

“She’d had a taste of corporate life at IBM with the paychecks. She had a lot of energy and action from Stanford, so she was ahead of her time in that regard. We’re still talking about an era where there was a substantial number — a minority of women in the working world.”



Dunn at the Seattle Opera. "My mouth was hanging open through the whole dinner," says former U.S. Senator Slade Gorton of his introduction to Jennifer Dunn. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* photo.

Dunn spent those early years volunteering, engaged in the Junior League, Opera Guild, and the Art Museum. "I'll just tell you," she said years later. "One thing that's always bothered me is I don't think volunteers get enough credit. I belonged to several organizations. I was a docent at our art museum. I produced the Metropolitan Opera's national auditions in the Northwest of the United States and Canada and Alaska. There again, I was into helping young people."

Meantime, in 1970, Dennis Dunn had begun six years of service as chair of the King County Republican Party. "Dennis Dunn was much more conservative than his wife was," concludes Gorton. "I imagine politics was the main item of conversation in that house. Dennis was really far right and (for) the gold standard – and all sorts of things I think are nutty. But Jennifer didn't reflect that kind of hard line ideology."

When the boys were little, Dennis and Jennifer Dunn brought them to a GOP fundraiser in King County. Reagan was about four years old at the time. "We have a picture of the Governor (Ronald Reagan) bent over at the waist absolutely guffawing with laughter as he is shaking hands with little Reagan who's 3 or 4," recalls Dennis Dunn. "Because Reagan has just asked as the Governor if he brought him... a black balloon. Balloons were Reagan's toy of choice at the moment. And he thought since black was so rare it'd be the rarest and most valuable balloon in the world."

It was about this time, says Slade Gorton, that he got his first glance at Jennifer Dunn. "I remember the first time we met very distinctly. We were at the same table at a major Republican fundraising dinner, which in those days is \$100 a plate, I think for probably the State Party. This would have been in the early 1960's. And she and Dennis were there. My memory was she was one of the most beautiful women I had ever met. My mouth was hanging open through the whole dinner."

In 1976, Dennis and Jennifer Dunn entered Washington politics with a force. Dennis was named Washington's Republican National Committeeman; his wife Jennifer landed a job as statewide coordinator for Ronald Reagan's first presidential bid.

"She became active in politics with Reagan," says Gorton, "when Governor Reagan ran unsuccessfully against Gerald Ford."

Reagan narrowly lost the party nomination to Gerald Ford by a mere 117 votes. After the loss, the former candidate stayed in the game traveling the country and stumping for his onetime opponent Ford.

Dunn moved over to work with Chris Bailey at the Ford Campaign Headquarters on Seattle's Queen Anne Hill. The campaign was Dunn's first political victory. In Washington State, Ford/Dole won the election against Carter/Mondale 50% to 46.11%.

The single mom

But by this time, the Dunn marriage had run its course. The two differed on degrees of conservatism, says Dennis Dunn. “I didn’t believe that under any circumstances a woman had the right to choose death for her unborn child and she and I differed on that. As a matter of fact, my mother and I differed on that.”

The split, finalized in 1979, was quite amicable. “She and Dennis just got to a point where they both had opposite needs,” explained longtime friend and colleague Lisa LaBrache. “I mean, they loved the kids and just were totally involved as parents, which really held them together. And Jennifer wanted to start moving into politics and got started in that with Dennis. Dennis was King County Chairman and had done a variety of other things, and had got her started in that arena. And she had, I think it was just a sense of, ‘We’re kind of moving in opposite directions – we’re friends, we have our children, we have different life expectations.’”

Soon, Dennis Dunn moved north to Vancouver and the Dunn family pulled together.

“The dad takes another residence, the children stay in the current residence where we stay,” recalled Reagan. “And then there is sort of visitation every other weekend kind of thing. But my dad – after a few years – moved up to Canada where he got a job. So, that made it a little more distant, and I think put on a little more pressure. “

Dunn became a single working mom of the 1970s. Reagan remembers the days of simple sandwiches and his hard-working mom burning the midnight oil to juggle work demands and two active boys.

“She was a terrible cook. It’s really true, just terrible. But that’s because she didn’t practice much. I remember lunches were the same. I could tell the story about the trout she cooked. But, she used to take a piece of Wonder Bread, you know, the plain white Wonder Bread, and take one of those processed cheese slices, slap it in there between the bread, and that was it, no mustard, no mayo, no nothing, not even a piece of lettuce — it was not so good. She was working, and because she got a divorce from my father when I was about six — then especially in the context of 1977, you know, you’re talking about a woman who has to support two young single-aged boys who are growing up, and also trying to make money.



An endearing image of mother and son. Says Reagan of his mother’s life: “It’s an enormous success story for single mothers. I mean, it shows that it can be done.” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* photo.

“You know, early on Mom was an assistant in accounting, trying to make ends meet on I don’t know what it was, \$17,000 dollars a year. There was nothing there. We all were subjected to a divorce situation.”

But all things considered, Reagan credits his mother for making it work. “It’s an enormous success story for single mothers. I mean, it shows that it can be done. It was, I think, very, very hard for her, as it is for all single parents.

“We had sort of a nanny, a wonderful woman name Hilda who was German and very tough, and was a good disciplinarian, and would kind of hang out with us from 3:00 to 6:00 or 7:00 when mom got home. So, that helped. You’ve got to have help. I think it is true with all mothers. But she, you know, she just gave a lot of herself. So, when she wasn’t working and succeeding she was home working hard on the kids. I think we got a fair shake.”



“We were survivors,” says Reagan of his parents after the divorce, but the two remained committed to their boys. *Dunn family photo.*

Far from bitter, Dennis and Jennifer Dunn remained committed to the boys and each other. Years later, Dennis attended political events on the campaign trail and helped raise money on behalf of this ex-wife. *(Editor’s Note: Dennis Dun eventually returned to Washington in 1999. He is married to Karen Dunn.)* “When she ran for Congress he was out there left and right with all of his friends raising money, made

sure the family was there. He was there at the first kick-off event. Came to every one of them,” admires LaBrache.

Dunn had re-entered the workforce taking a job for then-King County Assessor Harley Hoppe and an interest in tax policy was born.

The first campaign: “The last thing he wants to do is get in a spitting match with Jennifer Dunn”

In 1980, the now experienced single mom made the gutsy and calculated decision to run for chair of the Washington State Republican Party. Never in history, had state party officials elected a woman for such a crucial job. Always one to do the homework first, Dunn tested the waters.

Meantime, Duane Berentson, an 18-year, highly-regarded legislator from Mount Vernon, was doing the same, toying with taking on the prominent role. Berentson said in a phone conversation years later he never seriously considered the job. He’d held public

office for nearly two decades and climbed the ranks of state politics to the prestigious, influential role of House Speaker, a position he co-chaired with Democrat John Bagnariol of Renton. At first blush, a contest with Berentson would have appeared difficult for Dunn. After all, as Nina Shapiro put it in the *Seattle Weekly*, “Dunn was then a stay-at-home mom best known as ex-wife of party stalwart Dennis Dunn.”

“Are you, I asked House Speaker Duane Berentson, really interested in becoming the next Republican state chairman?” pondered the incomparable and feisty columnist Adele Ferguson. “His answer was a guarded ‘yes.’ Guarded, because the last thing he wants to do is get in a spitting match with Jennifer Dunn. Mrs. Dunn is the former wife of national committeeman Dennis Dunn and so ardent a Reagan fan she even named her son after him. Reagan Dunn, that is.”

Dunn received a personal phone call from Berentson, says her family. “Hey, you know, let’s meet at Denny’s on Mercer Island,” son Reagan recalled of the story his mother had told him. “‘I want to talk to you about this thing.’ Well, this is what happens when you want to meet somebody. You want to big-time them and say, ‘Look, I’m the guy. I’m going to make it.’”

“It is my understanding,” added Thomson, “that after a conversation about which of them would withdraw, Jennifer pulled a piece of paper out of her pocket with overwhelming support of the State Central Committee. The absolute principle the rest of her life was that she always knew what the vote count was and she had done her homework.”

“Ultimately, in 1980, she organized the state for Ronald Reagan,” explains Reagan. “That really gave her statewide contacts that mattered a lot. So, that was after the divorce that she had had that entree through my dad and then after succeeding to organize the state for Reagan, had 39 counties worth of contacts which correlates into her run for state party chairman.”

“When she ran, she got in a car and drove the entire state and met in the kitchens with people that were going to vote on who the next Party chair was going to be,” remembers Doug Ellis, the Executive Director of the State Party. Dunn would eventually hire.



“For me, he was the one who *really* focused me on politics and that I didn’t have to be mean spirited and cynical,” beamed Jennifer Dunn, a part of the Reagan movement. *Dunn family photo.*

In the end, Dunn ran unopposed, won unanimously, and made history as the first woman at the helm of the Washington State Republican Party.

“We’ve inherited a strong state party operation... We’ve established a record of winning elections,” Dunn declared to the Republican State Central Committee at the time. The new chairman also inherited a \$1 million budget, 20,000 contributors, and a staff of 15. Spokane County’s Grant Peterson won the seat of Vice Chairman.

Of her new title, Dunn discouraged fellow Republicans from calling her chairwoman. “Chairman, that’s what I prefer.”

From state headquarters on Queen Anne, Dunn was determined to improve relations between the State Party and Republican county organizations and boost the party’s visibility.

Only the year before, Democrats controlled the Legislature and all but one of the Congressional seats. But as Chairman Dunn swooped to the top post, Republicans gained control of the State House and the State Senate for the first time in nearly three decades. That’s not all. On top of the legislative gains, Republicans won the Governor’s Office, a U.S. Senate seat, and an additional U.S. House seat. At the state level, they won the offices of Secretary of State, Attorney General, Commissioner of Public Lands, and Insurance Commissioner.

In her new position, Dunn remained close with ex-husband Dennis telling reporters her “friend” is “... in and out of this office all the time. We’re both on the Republican National Committee.”

Right away, Dunn was asked to clarify her position on abortion, one of the most divisive issues in politics. She was candid. “I understand where the moralists are coming from and I appreciate their point of view. But when I get down to what my feeling is on it, I can’t get past my basic belief that each individual should be under as little regulation as possible, and should therefore have the right to make that decision herself.”

It was an historic time for women in state party politics, but Dunn refused to capitalize on gender. “I’ve never used my being a woman to get anyplace in my life,” she told the Associated Press. “I’ve always set high standards for myself as an individual. The basic Republican philosophy is that you look at a person’s capabilities rather than it’s a man or a woman.” But the working mom did not support the Equal Rights Amendment. At the time, she said it was impossible to legislate an end to gender discrimination.



Seattle Post-Intelligencer photo.



Karen Marchioro and Jennifer Dunn hit their stride in state politics together, but on opposite sides of the aisle. Ironically, Marchioro died 5 days before Dunn in 2007.

As Dunn made history as the first woman chair of the Washington State Republican Party, the Democrats across the aisle did the same, electing their first woman chair, Karen Marchioro. “Both have received accolades for their work in rebuilding state parties, financially and politically,” noted *Pacific Magazine* showing glimpses into a photo shoot in which Dunn and Marchioro are pictured cracking up.

Yet the women are political opposites. Reporters called Dunn a “dyed-in-the-wool conservative closely aligned with the Reagan wing of the party.” Declared

The Seattle Times, “Dunn is a tall, gracious woman who, at 42, still turns male heads in a crowded room. She is a

conservative, but has found ways to accommodate the moderate-to-liberal wins (wings) of the party, softening old antagonisms that date back two decades.”

On the other end, noted the *Times*, Marchioro was “aligned with the liberal wing of her party. She’s short, somewhat stout and shows little concern for style. Her round cheeks glow when she gets angry and when something tickles her you can hear her fractured soprano laugh down the tiled corridor of the building.”

The newly anointed party chief mystified Slade Gorton who, after spending nearly 50 years in public service, couldn’t fathom playing the role.

“I’m talking about a job that I think is one of the worst jobs in the world,” Gorton emphasizes. “Almost immediately getting an office like that, you have to reach out and appeal to others. “People say you are no longer a purist and they go after you. And people were all over Jennifer all the time, and almost always from the right. She was too compromising. She was too much for the big tent. But Jennifer, because of her personality largely and her dedication, kept the party together.”

“I loved it. I loved every minute of it,” an enthused Dunn expressed years later to C-SPAN. “I loved the challenge of it. I loved the chance to be able to work on behalf of something I believed in — loved the freedom to be with children — loved commuting to Washington D.C.”

Dunn’s passion for the job paid off in her performance, says Gorton, who considers her one of the most effective party chairs of all time. “The only person comparable to her as State Chairman was Gummie Johnson (C. Montgomery Johnson) in the early Dan Evans years,” assesses Gorton. “I think what the two of them shared was passion. They believed in what they were doing.”

“We had a joke,” reveals LaBrache who’d worked for Dunn at the State Party. “We had a million and a half to two million dollar budget per year. And the joke was, you had to go get your major donors, and if you wanted to have lunch with Jennifer it was going to cost you \$5,000.”

“She was bright and she was conservative,” says Ellis. “And she was concerned about state government and national government. She was a *strong, strong* Reagan supporter. And he just got elected in 1980 for the first time. And so she was part of the Reagan movement which was a little more flexible on social issues, but more conservative on fiscal matters. And so she had this “in-betweeness” about her.”

But it wasn’t always easy for Dunn, says Ellis. According to the former Executive Director, many Republicans doubted her ability in those first days, but not because she was a woman. “I think they thought that she couldn’t raise the money. I remember I was on vacation and it was just after I signed up with Jennifer in the spring of ’81. I decided I needed a break after the long session so I took a vacation. And I got a call from her saying that she was getting pushback from some elected officials and they were trying to toss her out as she just got elected chair. And so I had to fly back and meet with those elected officials and tell them, ‘Back off. This is going to work.’ And that’s when they were telling me that they didn’t think that she could raise the money. And I said, ‘Give her a chance.’”

Soon, Dunn proved she had what it takes to raise big dollars. In fact, it was under her leadership, says Ellis, that the party shifted its fundraising base from major donors to the grassroots. “The older contributors stayed on and she brought in brand new ones because of her appeal,” Ellis explains. “We then took the party from a major donor based fundraising operation and created a huge grassroots direct mail operation and telephone bank operation. And so we shifted, we still had a large major donor component... (and) we were collecting at least four or five hundred, seven hundred thousand dollars on direct mail.”

As chair, Ellis credits Dunn with understanding how to recruit electable candidates and win public office. Jennifer Dunn’s Republican Party offered a big tent without a litmus test on social issues in sight.

“Those weren’t the driving factors in the Republican Party, at least *her* Republican Party,” says Ellis. “And it got harder and harder as the Christian conservative right became more vocal. And it turned out as they started shifting towards that more social and moral issues that it became harder and harder to get people elected.

“You can talk and scream and stand on a soapbox and yell, but you’re never going to be able to change the direction of the economy or the direction of the state or nation without getting elected. She knew, particularly in Washington State, you needed to break away from any litmus test. You also needed to find candidates that fit the individual districts that they were running from.” During her tenure, Dunn approached up-and-coming Republican all-stars. “It’s like a whole generation of Republicans have lost their mom,” remarked Brett Bader after she died.

Somehow, in the midst of travel, important dinners, and fundraising calls, she kept motherhood the priority. “We were survivors,” recalls Reagan. “We were all just trying to make it work. It’s just like a family business. You know, your parents own a grocery store on the street corner and at 12 you’re going to be bagging groceries, and when you’re 14

you're going to be helping with the cashier, when you're 16 you'll be driving the truck. It's just part of the family business. It's just your reality. So you get used to it, and you realize we're all going to help out here, and that's kind of the way it was with us."

The death of an icon

On September 1, 1983, legendary U.S. Senator Henry M. Jackson died suddenly of an aortic aneurysm stunning Washington politicians and shaking up the political landscape. The death of "Scoop" – a nickname he earned from his sister for his resemblance to a cartoon character – created opportunity for Republicans. Then-Governor John Spellman appointed Republican Dan Evans to fill the seat. Evans ran in a special election a short time later and served the remainder of Jackson's term.

"Jennifer knew that her job as party leader was to keep that seat in Republican hands, and she used her credibility as a Reagan supporter to unify the party behind Evans," pointed out Carlson. "The former governor was grateful, and a friendship ensued that lasted until Jennifer's death."

By 1984, Chairman Dunn had won over the local media. "While the Democrats slug it out among themselves, Dunn presides over a state party that she has skillfully knitted together for the first time in twenty years. Spellman, never the apple of the conservatives' collective eye, might well have faced a primary challenge without the new spirit of Dunn-aided unity in the party."

Possibilities for Dunn in national politics surfaced. "Reagan (President

Ronald Reagan) has called on her several times to put out brush fires among Republican women unhappy over his refusal to back the Equal Rights Amendment. And she has been largely successful in quieting some of the unhappy voices among Republican women in Washington State," noted *The Seattle Times'* Dick Clever.

Many well respected Republicans praised Dunn for avoiding the pitfalls that can accompany political party platforms, statements of principles and positions on issues. Party platforms can be radical, misconstrued, or both. Carlson, a Dunn protégé once authored several dozen pages of proposed Republican Party platform language for Dunn, which he



Though sometimes accused of waffling on issues, the striking Jennifer Dunn was like a "rock star" say longtime friends, even in her early days leading the Washington State Republican Party. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* photo.

proudly cut to ten. While Carlson was pleased, Dunn was not. In the end, the final draft of the Republican platform was limited to four pages – to which Dunn declared, “Perfect!”

“Looking out for the greater good,” was one of Dunn’s strengths as chairman, says Ellis. “Making sure that our elected officials didn’t have to say – try to embrace a document or a platform that was just so far on the fringe they would have to run away from it. She was always pragmatic. She was always reasonable.”

But, human, adds Ellis. “She sometimes got focused on things and she would change her mind a lot. A lot of times when people talked to her about certain philosophies and activities, she sometimes would bend that way, more than standing up on her own. But she was flexible. I guess it’s a good trait in some ways. She was flexible enough to not be rigid. But then sometimes you would look and say, ‘Stand on your own two feet. This person isn’t the end all.’ But, she would sway a little bit. So, she wasn’t rigid but sometimes it seemed like she was swaying with whatever the push was at that point in time.

“And she was always a little vain. I guess everybody is. I remember she would always walk out and say, ‘How do I look?’ “‘You look fine. Get out of here.’ Wherever she went... But she was some kind of woman, there’s no question about it. “

“The scuffle”

In 1988, Dunn’s political hero, Ronald Reagan, toiled in the sunset of his presidency, preparing to close the door on eight years in the White House. His likely successor, then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, had the Republican nomination all but locked up. Bush’s onetime rival, pillar of the Religious Right and TV evangelist Pat Robertson dropped his presidential bid in May. In June, however, a scuffle erupted on the floor of the Snohomish County Republican Convention between Robertson supporters and backers of Bush.

“So far, I think I’ve heard about 40 different accounts,” Dunn concluded in *The Seattle Times* after the clash.

Greatly outnumbered by the Robertson camp, Bush supporters used cumulative voting to select their delegates for the state convention. (*Editor’s Note: Cumulative voting allows delegates to use all votes for county delegate slots at the state convention for a single candidate.*) Calling the practice unfair, the Robertson camp asked County Chair Richard Thomas to halt the vote. “When the chairman refuses to listen to you anymore and refuses to accept any motions on the floor, the convention is in anarchy,” Bruce Hawkins lashed out at Chairman Thomas in *The Seattle Times*.

By most accounts, Robertson supporters took control of the podium and selected their own slate of delegates.

After the county convention was over, Thomas, a staunch Bush supporter, fired off a letter to Dunn demanding the State Party “discipline conservatives” he labeled “power hungry” and “potentially violent.”

Next in line, of course, was the State Convention to be held in Tacoma. Party Chairman Dunn pledged a “totally fair process” and accentuated her top priority – party unity.

A credentials committee met and determined that if questions arose at the state convention, it would not admit Bush delegates but would admit supporters of Pat Robertson, despite the fact that Robertson had since dropped his bid for the presidency. “This is an example of what happens when they allow religious zealots to put their stamp on the party,” accused Vern Witte.

In the end, the Robertson team “won lopsided control of the Washington delegation.” Only a handful of Washington delegates who went on to the Republican National Convention supported Bush, though he had the nomination locked nationally. “I tried to run a fair state convention,” Dunn told the media. “And it was a fair procedure.”

Republican National Convention, 1988: “You’ve got all these other party chairmen, and nobody is paying attention. They’re all circled around Jennifer.”

When the pace of the presidential election season intensified in August. The media proclaimed the 1988 Republican National Convention an event “made for television – in the age of carefully orchestrated politics.” In the dog days of summer, the GOP boss of Washington State boarded a plane for the Louisiana Superdome. By this time, Dunn had paid her dues and proven her worth – bumping up national party ranks to chair all state party chairs in the nation.

“I think she had a softness about her,” says Ellis of her appeal to Republicans nationally. “Even though she was conservative, even though she was a strong fiscal conservative, or a Reagan conservative... She came across as not being radical, she came

across as being soft, as being reasonable, being able to articulate what she thought the Republican Party meant and that gave her this sort of stature.”

In this role, Dunn headed to New Orleans known worldwide for its unbearable humidity, raucous Mardi Gras celebrations, and soulful jazz. That year, the city would host the biggest names the Republican Party had to offer. An audience filled with a mix of moderate Republicans, the party faithful and zealots converged on the city for the Republican National Convention. In tow was Lisa LaBrache, a school teacher and self-described homebody. After meeting Dunn, LaBrache jumped headfirst into politics and never looked back.

“We got into New Orleans, and god it was hot,” recalls LaBrache. “It was like the middle of August. The last place you want to be in the middle of August is in New Orleans. We had a delegation



Ever the proud Republican, Dunn always put family first. “She was, above all things a wonderful lady who was full of love,” says eldest son Bryant. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer photo.*

that was fairly unruly at that time, and they weren't real friendly to Jennifer. But it didn't matter. She brushed all that aside and started looking at how she had to appear nationally."

George H.W. Bush stood poised to accept the Republican Party nomination for President of the United States, hoping to follow in the footsteps of Ronald Reagan, for whom he'd served as Vice President.

"Washington State Republicans will give new meaning to the political term 'strange bedfellows' when they take up residence this week at the Metairie Holiday Inn in New Orleans," announced *The Seattle Times*. At the time, the newspaper concluded roughly 80-percent of the citizens of New Orleans were Democrats.

Dunn and Republican leaders were joined by the followers of Robertson, who'd thrown his hat in the ring for president and founded organizations like the Christian Coalition. Robertson had energized the Christian conservative right like never before.

Meanwhile, Republican National Committeeman Jim Summers hoped to beef up the party's conservative muscle and oust Dunn from leadership. He accused her of strengthening the state party at the expense of county parties and the grassroots.

"You always think, well, the party is always united. Eh, not so much," chuckles LaBrache. "There are always these little factions and things going on. And you need to be aware of them."

The elements were too much, even for Dunn who'd become famous for her impeccable wardrobe. "This beautiful silk outfit that she was going to wear got *soaked*," explains LaBrache. "Just with all the water, I mean, nobody had seen humidity like that. It was just insane."

It didn't take long for media to gravitate toward Dunn in New Orleans, says LaBrache. "Immediately the press descended upon her. I mean, here you're seeing all the local press guys. You've got KIRO News. You've got KING 5. You see all of these people circle around her and these national faces. And she knows every one of them. She knows the Chairmen of the Party. She knows many of the members of the House and the Senate that are there. And you're thinking, 'You've got all these other party chairmen, and nobody is paying attention. They're all circled around Jennifer.'"

Robertson took the stage and asked his followers to cast votes for Bush.

Touting "Experienced leadership for a better America" and asking a packed house to "...see me for what I am; the Republican candidate for president," George Bush accepted the Republican nomination for the country's top job.

Meanwhile, Dunn networked with Republican rising stars. "Here she is, she's having dinner with Colin Powell," recalls LaBrache. "And I think, 'How sweet is this?' And we're all looking at each other saying, 'Yeah, we're with the rock star here. And this is the place to be."

"We got back after four or five days at the convention. And with the local press it was great, and all of her interviews had gone really well. She looked at me and she said, 'Well, do you want to work for me? I'd love to have you work for me.' It wasn't until later years that I realized that Jennifer just handed the *world* on a silver platter to me."

The case of Diane Ballasiotes

But the emotional high of the convention plummeted soon after when a former staff person and good friend of Dunn's disappeared. The evening of September 26, 1988, Diane Ballasiotes left her Seattle ad agency in Pioneer Square unaware of a nearby jailbreak. "A person who was in the community but had been in a group home... had been a sexual predator... kidnapped her and raped her and murdered her with a knife," remarked Dunn revisiting the gruesome details. "And it was a really tough time."

The escapee from Reynolds Work Release Center, twice convicted of assault before killing Ballasiotes, fled east. But life on-the-run did not last. Authorities re-captured Gene Raymond Kane, Jr. in the Yakima Valley and locked him up for life. Within a week's time, a worker for the Seattle Parks Department discovered the body of Diane Ballasiotes, partially hidden under a piece of sheet metal. The shocking case turned Dunn's world upside down.

"A lot of things happened as a result. I started thinking. How can this happen? I looked at our laws as a state party chairman. I wanted to take a look at what was happening in the state legislature. There were no laws about notifying a community, if a sexual predator moves into a community. So... in 1990, we got that law passed."

A Congressional Calling

By this time, Jennifer Dunn had spent more than a decade in the seat of Washington State Republican Party Chair making a name for herself as a bridge builder and an effective fundraiser. "In fact, she was in line, toward the end of her time before she ran for Congress, she was moving up to possibly being vice-chair of the National Republican Party," Ellis points out. "And she was close to that and then she backed down and decided not to go there. But, there was a good possibility that she could have made that."

Her world was changing. Dunn's two boys, Bryant and Reagan, prepared for college. U.S. Representative Rod Chandler opted to give up his seat in the 8th Congressional District for a shot at the U.S. Senate.

"Well, she had pretty much reached the pinnacle of what she could do with the State Party," explains LaBrache. "She had been there 11 years. It was in the top five state parties nationally. She had already done work at the UN (United Nations). She'd done a lot of international work with women. She'd developed a wonderful context nationally. She looked at the party as it was getting ready to leave one president. Hopefully another Republican president would come through and be elected. Her children were old enough. She said, 'It's time for me, if I want to, I need to move from the state to the national stage. I have an opportunity with an open seat. And I wouldn't be taking anything from anybody. It's mine to win.' And that drove the rationale."

The talks swirling around Dunn's entrée into public service had circulated the grapevine since "Scoop" Jackson died. It was too early, said Dunn looking back, but nonetheless, it planted the seed.

"I started thinking about Congress at a time when my children were about ready to leave for college," said Dunn. "I was a single mother from the time my boys were six and eight. And that involves a lot of focus and a lot of juggling of schedules. I remember trying to get my kids to daycare at the time that I was supposed to be at my office holding a full-time job. This was long before the state Chairman's job. I was working for somebody else. I remember sometimes not being able to get to work on time – and that was a tough feeling. That's a feeling that teaches you what that knot in your stomach is all about."

Recalls LaBrache: "She sat down with them and said, 'This is what I'm thinking about.' And they both were in high school, Bryant was getting ready to go into college, maybe he was in his first year of college and Reagan was right behind. She said, 'You know, if I do this there is going to be a change. There is going to be a change in what our family does. How it's viewed. You're going to be more in the limelight. You may notice this when you're at school. You're going to see me in the press and so will your friends. Let's talk about how you feel about this.' And they had those long, heartfelt conversations and the boys said, 'Mom, you want to do this, and we *want* you to do this. And we will be with you a hundred percent of the way. We know that our lives are changing, but that's okay. This is very exciting. And it will open up avenues for us as well – as we go down the road for the decisions we make within our lives.' So, they were very keen to make sure that their mother followed through on the dream that she had."

"I scratched my head a little because I had known her real well," says Ellis of Dunn's decision to run. "I mean, we were *absolutely very, very, very close* for seven or eight years, working together day to today, constantly. I was thinking, 'Do you really want to do this?' She knew the problems, and the sacrifices, and the hard work, and the agony, putting yourself out on a limb to say take me or don't take me. Things beyond your control could sometimes tip an election one way or another. We'd talked about it saying, 'We really don't want to do that.' And somehow, she said yeah."

Friends and colleagues set up an exploratory committee to test the waters for a Congressional run. Dunn made sure the State Party was in tip top shape before walking out the door. Debts had been paid and the Republicans were sitting on roughly \$60,000 in the bank, says LaBrache. "She called on (John Meyers) and myself and said, 'I'd like you to go over the campaign with me. (Meyers), you'll run the campaign. Lisa, you'll be his second. You'll raise all the money.'"

"We talked a lot about it before she made the decision," says Reagan. "So she had been State Party Chair for 10 years at the time she made the decision. It was very important to her to not try and run as the State Party Chair, she wanted to *step down* and run."

"Yes," agrees LaBrache. "She had lots of conversations with people she trusted – folks that were within the local community of politics and folks who were at the national level. Always looked to see what kind of money could be raised, what are the problems with pros and cons because they were just looking at the positive – so aware of the

negatives. On the national level, what are going to be the issues that I'm going to have to be dealing with, which are totally different."

"She didn't run the State Party because she wanted to be elected," clarifies Reagan. "She ran the State Party because she wanted to run the State Party. Being in Congress was an afterthought. After eight or ten years she had people approach us, 'You'd be great for Congress. Chandler is running for the Senate, why don't you think about it?' And I remember her talking about a Congressional race, she talked with us, and we talked with others, and she decided she was going to go for it.

"You give up *a lot* to run for public office. First of all, your family is subject to public scrutiny all the time. You are spending countless hours on the plane back and forth. I mean, you're always working. And you've got to raise a couple million dollars every cycle, if not for your own campaign, for leadership races of various kinds. Every time you're out to dinner you're being addressed, talked to, bottles of champagne sent over. It sounds great, but it gets old fast. So you give up a lot. Public service is hard. It's the price you pay for living in a free society."

"I figured she'd win no matter what," says Ellis. "If she committed to doing it she was going to win. There was no question. She had tenacity and the ability to bring smart people together, to be able to make things happen. So, yeah, I knew she was going to win, I just didn't think that she would want to go that route. But, she did and it worked out well for her."

Hanging up her hat as Party Chair

Dunn decided a clean break was in order. She stepped down as Republican Party Chair to embrace a run for the United States Congress, representing the 8th District of Washington. She officially resigned as Chairwoman in February of 1992.

"Which is interesting because she wouldn't have been able to do that if she hadn't been a good money manager," appreciates Reagan. "She was *always* very good at saving money and very good about that, and she was able to live on her savings and run that race."

"And that was the thing," points out LaBrache. "She was very good at making sure that the coffers were full. And when she decided at the end of '91, started to think about running for Congress after having that conversation with Rod Chandler and knowing that it was going to be an open seat – Jennifer was always good at preparing, looking six miles, ten miles down the road. So, she would always see the field in front of her. So she'd get a full vision of what was going to happen two, three, four years down the road and try to anticipate those things. So, she started putting together some ideas about running. Talked to a wide variety of people, which was another, not just a Jennifer thing, but a method of successful people engaging lots of folks before you make the final decision. Get as much information as you can. And then you go home and you pull out the yellow sheet of paper. And you have your pros and cons, but you don't do it in a vacuum."

Always one to do her homework, Dunn thoroughly explored the possibility of a campaign for the 8th District seat. The Eastside suburbs were billed by the *Seattle Post-*

Intelligencer as “bedrock Republican, the most Republican district west of the Cascades.” Voters of the 8th District had yet to send a Democrat to Congress. The district stretched over portions of King and Pierce counties and included the high-tech industry, scenic mountain slopes and rural areas.

On March 18, 1992, Dunn came out swinging, formally announcing her bid for Rod Chandler’s seat. Hundreds cheered at the hometown announcement as she called out abusers in a check-kiting scandal. An investigation into the claims revealed a long list of U.S. Representatives overdrew their House bank accounts writing hundreds of bad checks.

“For some Members of Congress, this has become their own personal gravy train,” Dunn told the crowd. “They buy a ticket with a bounced check. They eat in the dining room without paying the tab. And when the train enters the tunnel, where it’s dark and no one’s looking, they give themselves a pay raise.”

And the campaign that launched Jennifer Dunn Congressional career began.

Dunn for Congress: “I’ll tell you – there was magic in that race.”

The heart and soul of Jennifer Dunn’s bid for Congress rested in a sprawling bank building on the Eastside, 148th Street in downtown Bellevue. It was enormous. “You could run a bowling ball through the large campaign office with room to spare,” jokes Lisa LaBrache. The Dunn camp strived to become *the* headquarters for Washington Republicans – a hub for campaign staff, hard-working volunteers, and the candidates themselves through the chaotic months and final countdown leading up to Election Day. Thanks to an exploratory committee, longtime ties to Republicans in and out of state, and meetings with local businesses, Dunn launched the campaign as a widely-viewed frontrunner with a \$40,000 war chest.



The Dunn mantra, “Let’s give Congress a good name,” plastered the district. “We were everywhere,” recalls LaBrache. “Literally, we had hundreds of volunteers that came up. Because we had all those folks at the State Party, statewide, that wanted to help her. And I think we even ended up with Jennifer Dunn yard signs in Spokane. It was crazy. We even put one just outside of the boundaries of Mt. Rainier. We *covered* the place. But that was the M.O., the M.O. was, ‘I am everywhere. You will always have access to me. And I’m not taking anything for granted.’”

The first campaign followed a hectic pace that Dunn would keep her entire career. Every weekend she arrived at the office, pounded the pavement door-belling, made the obligatory campaign finance calls, and inspired the team.

“Anytime there was a chamber meeting or anything going on that we needed to know about she did it,” says LaBrache. “The first kickoff breakfast we did was at the Double Tree in Bellevue, down on 112th. And at that time that was the biggest venue we could get. And we packed it at 750 we thought it was huge. We had standing room only. And then it just took off from there. Virtually, it was a 24-7 campaign.”

It was in this vein, that the constituents of the 8th District were formally introduced to Jennifer Dunn, the Congressional candidate. “She had a marvelous flair,” says U.S. Senator Slade Gorton admirably. “Part of her trademark, her signature, was standing out in the crowd. She was just a magnificent dresser.”

“It was a presence – a physical presence,” offers LaBrache. “The way Jennifer walked into a room everybody acknowledged that she was somebody that they needed to pay attention to, the way she carried herself, the way she met people and spoke with people.”

“She had a lot of natural gifts,” sums up Reagan. “Once she was educated, she took the time to take her education seriously. I mean she was a better writer than just about anybody I’ve ever met. She was a very articulate speaker. But, she was also very attractive, you know, and back then a beautiful blonde woman who was attractive and had gone to Stanford and had these credentials, that helped a lot.”

“Even people that she didn’t like, or that didn’t like her, she would talk to and interact with,” points out her former executive director of the Republican Party, Doug Ellis. “And she had sort of an odd way of looking at things because most people would sit back and say, ‘You did something bad to me, therefore I’m going to be mad at you forever.’ Well, she never had that kind of thing. When she was disappointed in people, or people disappointed her, she would confront it and then move on. It was interesting because she never held anything in terms of grudges or anything like that. I always did, but she never did.

“She could just sit and talk for hours and chat about just about anything. And the thing about her was she didn’t look at people as in a class. I mean, she treated the garage mechanic the same as she treated the President of the United States.”

“She had an electrifying presence,” LaBrache adds. “It didn’t matter what party

you were from, didn't matter whether you agreed or disagreed, she was a woman to be acknowledged. It was just an aura about her."

On the campaign trail, Dunn carried her practical experience close to her heart. Her tenure as State Party Chair and life as a single mom served her well.

"I remember in 1991 when we were first starting to run for Congress," says Reagan. "You look at that two ways, you're a single mom or you're a divorced woman. What is that? Well, that's just rhetoric. That's just semantics. Of course, you're a single mom. That's what we focused on. She's a single mom. She's doing a great job. She's this *super woman*. She can do this – that – you know, bring home the bacon, take care of the kids."

But Dunn shared her determination to win the 8th District with five other candidates: Republican state Senator Pam Roach, Republican state Representative Roy A. Ferguson, Michael Campbell, a former mayor of Bellevue and fellow Republican. Democrat George O. Tamblyn and Independent Bob Adams also vied for the spot. All would appear on the same blanket primary ballot but only the top vote getter of each major political party and the Independent would advance to November.

"So, I mean, the primary was ours to lose," says LaBrache. "It was very hard fought. But Jennifer, again, maintained. And there are folks today that could take a lot of lessons from her because she always took the high road, it was issue driven. There was no need to get personal in anything."

"She was moderate," says Gorton, "a moderate stance on abortion, for example, and at that point even though she had come in from the right, from Ronald Reagan, at that point she was not ideological enough. She was not a pure conservative from the point of the very conservatives."

"I mean, here she is, she lives in Bellevue, she must be wealthy," recalls LaBrache of some of the assumptions made about Dunn. "Even though she's a single mom, it doesn't matter. You know, she runs around with all these highfalutin people, and a variety of other things, and she has no legislative experience. Well, running a state party, yes, you do have legislative experience...putting agendas together... what the Republicans were going to have as part of their platform. I mean, we had tons of interviews and she was out in the public. We would make sure that when there was any sort of an event going on that we had a lot of volunteers with us."

You would be hard-pressed to find two Republicans who differed more dramatically on style, approach, and personality than Jennifer Dunn and Pam Roach. Dunn wore the label of a blond beauty, a smooth candidate who loved the symphony and dressed in designer clothing. To the contrary, Roach was portrayed as a gun-toting conservative, blunt, outspoken, and fiercely proud of her blue-collar roots. The media made much to do out of the polar opposites – describing glares and swipes between the two as the candidates made the rounds at newspaper editorial boards.

“Dunn is Gene Juarez and Nordstrom;
Roach is home perms and Penney’s.”

- David Schaefer, *The Seattle Times*

“Sen.

Pam Roach has
made no secret
of the fact that
she doesn’t like
Jennifer Dunn.

And the feeling is mutual,” reported the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. “For weeks, the two top GOP contenders in the 8th District Congressional race have been doing everything in their power to undercut or ridicule each other.” Roach accused Dunn of handing the Republican Party to the right wing, while Dunn, according to the *Post-Intelligencer*, charged Roach with being “in the pocket or organized labor.”

“Several weeks ago, Dunn’s campaign took a piece of Roach’s campaign stationery and fastened to it a one-paragraph notice of the union endorsement under the heading “Dunn for Congress.” The last sentence stated, ‘Now we know for sure who Pam is talking about when she says, “She’s one of us!”’ Roach countered: “Oh yeah, take a look at all those \$1,000 contributions she’s getting. They’re not the common people, I’ll tell you that.”

In a famous editorial cartoon published by the *Valley Daily News*, Dunn sits comfortably in a limousine with a bumper sticker, “I’d rather be shopping at Nordstrom” in plain sight. Poking her head out the window, she poses to Roach, “Before we start (the campaign), would you happen to have any Grey Poupon?”

“By the time she ran for Congress, I was in college,” says Reagan. “I was a little more grown up and sort of got the sense of what was going on. I think we just realized that this was the job she had, and it happened to be high profile. We all played along. We played the game. We all showed up and did the prompts and spoke for her when she wasn’t able to. I know Mom had a few debates when she was running for Congress, and she had multiple things she had to attend, so she sent my brother. And he still was a kid. You can’t get mad at the kid. You can’t give bad answers.”

Dunn was a good match for the district, he concludes. She was pro-choice, but fiscally conservative. “She was thoughtful in her positions, and she had some conservative views, but on a litmus test issue she had some moderate streaks in her too. She was very careful about her rhetoric. You know, she wasn’t one of these politicians that throws bombs, that finds ways to offend, or is a lightning rod. She was a common sense conservative with some moderate social tendencies, and she knew how to sell it. So I think that fit this sort of affluent, very intelligent eastside portion of our county. And at the time it was a great fit, it worked really.”

“It wasn’t just something to win; it was do it and be the best,” says LaBrache. “And there was a lot of the “Year of the Woman” and all that sort of thing going on. And Jennifer constantly in the press was saying, ‘Listen, there are no women’s issues, *all* issues are women’s issues.’”

A primary win for Jennifer Dunn

The people of the 8th District sent Jennifer Dunn on to the General Election. The United States Congress and a new life in the nation's capital were well within reach. Dunn outspent Roach and came out on top, roughly three percentage points ahead.

"We had a *huge* bash primary night which we held in our campaign headquarters," recalls LaBrache. "It was clear that she was the woman to be reckoned with. And all the candidates who had run against her were very gracious and said, 'Hey, you ran the best race, congratulations. We're circling the wagon, and we're here.' And we took it from there and just went all out and made the case for electing her. And you know, it was Jennifer, Patty Murray – unfortunately, you know for her sake, it was the "Year of the Woman." You know, Rod Chandler didn't make it, and a variety of other things didn't happen. But, all we were concentrating on that night was us."



Jennifer Dunn casts her ballot as a Congressional hopeful in 1992.
Seattle Post-Intelligencer photo.

Countdown to November

On an adrenaline high from the State Primary victory, the General Election campaign pressed forward at the kind of mock speed expected in a high-profile political campaign. Then-campaign finance director Lisa Labrache remembered long hours, parades, endless doorbelling, and an especially humorous sight with Asian Americans who'd come out in a strong showing for the 8th District candidate. They'd offered to line up a phone bank using their personal contacts to raise money for Dunn.

"We said, 'Great,'" recalls LaBrache. "'Why don't you come on up? We've got all of our phones. We've got our volunteer desks. We'll set everything up for you. Bring your rolodexes and have at it.' So, they all brought their own personal rolodexes to call their friends and everything was in Chinese. You'd hear straight Chinese... Jennifer Dunn.' And it was amazing! This went on for like two hours. And we're all thinking, 'Where else would you ever see this?' We knew right then that we had crossed all borders. It was *absolutely amazing!*"

A Congresswoman is born

When election night finally arrived, the electricity of the night took hold. "Oh god, it was wild!" says LaBrache. "It was the place to be. Especially in '92, there wasn't that much to do. I mean, you had your computers. But they certainly weren't what they are now. I

mean, you can't track everything like you could on a national level. So, as we finished all the work it was, 'Okay, we're going to reconvene here. Everybody go out and vote and we're going to reconvene in the office at probably four or five o'clock and get ready for our parties which will start at seven-thirty because the polls close at eight, and take it from there.' And Jennifer said, 'That's kind of crazy, all this downtime.' So, we had started amongst ourselves, we made sure we made phone calls to any senior citizen that needed to be taken to the polls and participated in those operations. So we could get them. "

Soon, hundreds jammed into campaign headquarters flanked by television cameras, microphones, journalists, and the candidate. But there was an easiness to the evening, says LaBrache, even before final election results were tallied. "We have done everything right," an upbeat Dunn had told her campaign team that night. 'We have done *everything* we could possibly do. I wouldn't have gone back and changed a thing. What happens, happens. If we go on to Congress, we do. If not, we go on to our next life.'"

The message set a positive tone for the evening. "She said, 'There wasn't anything that wasn't perfect,'" recalls LaBrache of her encouragement that evening. "And we all looked at each other and said, 'Thank God' because it gave us a sense of comfort as well. If Jennifer says it's right, it's right. There was never any second guessing. And she was private in those moments. She went home with her kids, and they had the conversations of the 'what-ifs?' And she had her private time, and then she came out in public, put the public face on, and it was a good night. It was just a wonderful night."



U.S. Representative-elect Jennifer Dunn basks in victory after her 1992 campaign. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* photo.

In her signature red and flanked by family, Jennifer Dunn officially won the race for the 8th District seat. "And they announced the winner and both boys had huge bouquets of roses that they presented to her. And the rest of us were all sitting around, we were just beat, going, 'Holy god!' Then you start thinking, 'How am I going to live, where am I going to go?'" remembers LaBrache.

It was a dream come true.

"Oh I was thrilled," recalls Dennis Dunn. "She had gained her interest in politics through me through osmosis."

"There was another fine moment," says LaBrache. "The day after the General, we got a call from Fort Lewis, from the General. He said, 'Is the

Congresswoman there? I want to congratulate her and brief her on anything she would like to be briefed on.' And we said, 'Sure, not a problem.' And put Jennifer on the line. It turns out that she, as a Member of Congress, outranked a 2-star, so they had to salute her. And it was just perfect, you know. We're all going, 'Hey, look at this, you get saluted to.' You've got a bunch of us around going, 'Holy god, this is pretty cool.' They weren't saluting us, of course, but you're with the boss. It was again like, 'We're with the band here.'"

With her two boys back in college, Jennifer Jill Blackburn Dunn packed up life in Bellevue, Washington that winter and moved to Washington D.C. She'd landed her first job in public service as a U.S. Congresswoman. While Dunn had maintained relationships with many Republicans back east, she was the lone Republican headed to the nation's capital from the great State of Washington.

From that first election, LaBrache clarifies, Dunn never got caught up in stature. "As State Party Chairman, she was Jennifer. She was a Member of Congress, she was Jennifer. It wasn't any of this, 'I want my title first – I deserve that.' No, she was a woman of the people."

1992 brought women into politics with a force. Twenty-four clinched seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

There were surprises too. Rod Chandler, a ten-year veteran of the U.S. House of Representatives gave up his seat to challenge "mom-in-tennis shoes" Patty Murray for a spot in the U.S. Senate. In a fateful debate, Murray accused Chandler of boosting his own pay when families were struggling. Chandler infamously quoted a Roger Miller song, "Well, dang me, dang me, they ought to take a rope in hang me. Hang me from the highest tree. Woman, would you weep for me?"

Murray replied: "That's the attitude that brought me into this race, Rod."

As Murray laced her sneakers for Washington D.C., Dunn too had packed her bags. Dunn would represent the 8th Congressional District that spanned from Lake Washington, to the Cascades, and to Mt. Rainier. Historically, the area was once a wooded patch of land filled with towering trees. But by the time Dunn was elected, the region had blossomed into well-to-do communities, big business, and – for the most part – Republican country.

"I represent a district in Washington State that's east of Seattle," Dunn explained beaming. "And it's a gorgeous district – the most beautiful district in the nation. I have lots of mountains. I have most of the ski resorts in Washington State."

Move to the other Washington

The question posed to Lisa LaBrache would radically change her life. "Well? You're coming to D.C., right?" Asked an elated Jennifer Dunn, Washington's newly-elected U.S. Representative for the 8th Congressional District. "Yes!" replied LaBrache. By then, the answer had become routine. In fact, "There was never a, 'No,'" confessed the longtime friend. "In 20 years, I don't think there was ever a no. But, you know, you just open your mouth and whatever comes out is going to be the right thing. You just know it. "

The team had done the homework – asking about committee assignments and talking to seasoned experts who’d long since walked the Halls of Congress like the late Jack Kemp and Rod Chandler.

“Rod Chandler was awesome,” explains LaBrache with admiration. “He came in and said, ‘Listen. I have some great staff if you would like to keep any of them I would suggest you go with the scheduler, or this, because these two things are very important and you just can’t have a new person come in. It’s always good to have folks who have done the job.’ So, he counseled us very, very well.”

As it turned out, Washington D.C. agreed with Jennifer Dunn. She had a readymade circle of friends from her tenure as State Party Chair of the Washington State Republican Party.

“She was in the game the minute she stepped off the plane,” beams LaBrache. “And that was another thing that we noticed since we set up our office and we started hiring and saying, ‘You know we’re not a normal freshman office, this is not a normal freshman. She’s already been here.’ And we were expected to be at the top of the game. So staff expectation is huge.

“On the Republican side, everybody knew her. I mean she had already had a national following because of her work at the State Party, and chairman of all the state chairmen. So, she already ran in that circle.”

The freshman congresswoman chose an apartment in the “urban village” Pentagon City, near the Pentagon in Arlington County. “The apartment building looked right out over Nordstrom. I mean, come on, it doesn’t get any better than this!” chuckles LaBrache.

When they arrived in Dunn’s office, LaBrache described a scene straight out of *The Distinguished Gentleman*, a movie that debuted in 1992 about a con man who uses the death of a Congressman, with whom he shares the same name, to get elected to his federal post. “At the very beginning you see Eddie Murphy, he’s won his race, and he shows up, and he walks into a room and there’s just a *pile* of furniture. Stuff is just piled, desks on top of each other, computers are laying all over the floor, the drapes are on top of all – that’s basically the office we walked into,” laughed LaBrache.

According to LaBrache, the Dunn team started from scratch brimming with enthusiasm and excitement. “It was, ‘Okay. We’ve got to get this up and running because we’ve got constituents coming back. It’s opening day. Let’s rock and roll.’ So, we anticipated that. And then we also learned very quickly that members would put furniture outside in the corridors that they didn’t want. So, we basically went through and stole furniture. Well, we didn’t steal it. I mean, we just sort of apprehended it. It was out in the hallway. Nobody wanted it. That’s looks good.

“Jennifer would say, ‘I need a couch. Go get a couch.’ And so we would all be scurrying around all the office buildings, and we’d see one, and we’d lug the sucker back. And pretty soon she just started putting her touch on it.”

But, by the time she was sworn in January of 1993 recalls LaBrache, the office was on its feet and running smoothly. “The other thing she wanted to do is she wanted to host – you know, how the Members of Congress have receptions for other Members and for any of the guests that come back. There was a presidential race going on at the same time, so there were other things happening in this world. So, we had a lot of folks come out from Washington State. So we had already put together the invitations, gotten together with the other folks, the delegation saying, ‘Let’s put on a party and welcome everyone from Washington State.’ It was a four-ring circus all the time. And you were just expected to find the ball and run with it.”

“When she first came to Congress, we had a long conversation about being a member vs. being a player,” former Chief of Staff Phil Bond revealed to the *Times*. “With her skills and with the district she represents she could hold that seat for quite a while comfortably, or she could hold that seat and really try to become a national player that affected change and that is what she was interesting in doing.

The words stuck. In her first days as a Member of Congress, Jennifer Dunn “pushed an agenda of campaign-finance and reform.” Her committee assignments included transportation and science. As a freshman, Dunn encouraged all committees in the House to tighten their budgets by 25 percent. And unlike most members of the GOP, she supported the Violence Against Women Act to help authorities investigate and prosecute gender-motivated crime.



Dunn chose not to join the Women’s Caucus during her first term. “I found out they had taken a position on abortion, so I’m not going to join that group.”
The Impact of Women in Congress.
Seattle Post-Intelligencer photo.

Dunn, wrote the author of *The Impact of Women in Congress*, chose not to join the Women’s Caucus during her first term. “I found out they had taken a position on abortion, so I’m not going to join that group... [W]e shouldn’t get into endorsing political points of view on some of these problems where our approaches are diverse. That keeps out people who are friends of mine like Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Helen Bentley and Barbara Vucanovich.”

Reagan recalls her regularly scheduled trips to the Northwest. “She spent a lot of time studying. So, at night she would have this little place on the couch where she’d sit. She’d always have a stack of papers in front of her. She wouldn’t be watching TV, but she’d be doing her homework. She *really* did her homework – really, really did. And that makes a big difference because most elected officials just kind of rely on staff and don’t get into the details or the weaves or policy issues.”

The Megan Kanka story



The murder of Megan Kanka inspired Dunn and colleagues to propose legislation that requires registered sex offenders to notify communities where they live.

In the summer of 1994, a horrific crime took place in Hamilton, New Jersey that would lead Dunn to legislation she'd later call the capstone of her career.

Neighbor Jesse Timmendequas coaxed 7-year-old Megan Kanka into his home across the street on a promise to show her a puppy.

But Megan never returned. "We knew nothing about him," her grieving mother Maureen said after they learned of her daughter's tragic fate. "If we had been aware of his record, my daughter would be alive today." Timmendequas' dark past included two cases of assault against minors in 1979 and 1981. Timmendequas' lawyers argued at the time that the sexual offenses evolved from a traumatic childhood filled with incest and abuse at the hands of his father.

The case rocked the small New Jersey town.

It set the stage for Jennifer Dunn to propose legislation that protects children. There is no more important function of government, she would later say.

The Republican Revolution

Following the 1994 Republican sweep, Dunn returned to Washington D.C. after defeating Democrat Jim Wyrick. "She got 71 percent, in '94, which is *huge* to receive numbers like that – 76 percent in the General," declares son Reagan.

This time, Dunn was the veteran and showed the ropes to freshman Republicans Rick White, Jack Metcalf, Linda Smith, Doc Hastings, George Nethercutt, and Randy Tate.

Reagan attributes his mother's solid victory to "...interpersonal skills, hard work and (the makeup of the) constituency. There's an opportunity in a two-year term to touch a lot of lives if you're doing your job right you can do that. And she did, she did."

With only two years under her belt in the U.S. House of Representatives, Dunn was appointed to the powerful Ways & Means Committee whose members have gone on to serve as President, Vice President, Justice of the Supreme Court, and House Speaker, among a host of prominent roles.

"It's a stunning committee," remarked Dunn. "It touches people all across the spectrum. Not only do you have the tax issues on Ways & Means, but you have the trade issues, welfare, and Medicare. I worked very hard to get on the committee. I talked to a lot of people about the best committee in the House.



Wearing her signature red, Dunn is pictured on the prestigious Ways and Means Committee with only a handful of other women. U.S. House of Representatives photo.

“Nat Collins and Dave Camp and I were charged with writing the child support section (of welfare reform).... We were all new on the Committee and we... crashed on the first run. The committee laughed us out of the room because we gave the IRS the ability to look into the bank accounts of... deadbeat parents... who left the state... We were just too invasive, so we had to rewrite it,” Dunn summed up in *The Impact of Women in Congress*.

All things considered, Dunn was making a name for herself in the 104th Congress. On July 27, 1995, Dunn, New Jersey’s Dick Zimmer and Nathan Deal of Georgia introduced an amendment to the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. The legislation known as Megan’s Law answered the nation’s furor over the murder of Megan Kanka by requiring convicted sex offenders to notify the communities where they live. The legislation passed into law on May 17, 1996.

“King of the Hill”

Meanwhile, Dunn developed a special relationship with man-of-the-hour Newt Gingrich of Georgia, a controversial figure who’d climbed the ranks in Washington D.C. to become the prestigious House Speaker. *Time Magazine* dubbed Gingrich “King of the Hill” and named him “Man of the Year” in 1995 for ousting Democrats from control of the House after four decades. “Right now Americans are divided three ways on Gingrich: they love him, loathe him or can’t figure out who he is,” observed the magazine’s writers in January, 1995.

“They were soul mates in many ways,” says LaBrache looking back at their relationship. “I mean, Newt was a great thinker. And it was just at the time he had great ideas... The Democrats had been in charge for 40 years. There were already abuses. You had the Rostenkowski stuff going on. You had all these things. Newt, being the professor that he was, he already had the turn-of-phrase. So, when he would get up and speak, he knew exactly what he wanted to say and how to say it to get people interested. He was, again, full of energy. All of those folks were. And they brought her right in and said, ‘Okay, this needs to be your home. You’re in the inner circle here. We need to start plotting and planning.’” (Editor’s Note: Illinois Democrat Dan Rostenkowski, who rose to political fame as Chairman of the prestigious Ways & Means Committee, pleaded guilty in 1996 to two charges of mail fraud.)



"I still think he's the brightest person I ever met," said Dunn of Georgia's Newt Gingrich, former House Speaker. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* photo.

"(She was) very close with Newt," says Reagan. "In fact, Newt came over to my home the night of my mom's funeral. He was in town and came to the house and paid his respects. Mom and Newt got along famously. She was in leadership with Newt when he was Speaker of the House, as Conference Chair. And she really respected him for his

intellect. We all recognized that he has limitations as someone who can be a lightning rod. But his positions on policy are what you would call sort of purist conservative, not in that social way, I mean with wisdom. She enjoyed it. And that was really her era there."

"I still think he's the brightest person I've ever met," said Dunn herself in 2005. "He holds my fascination. He thinks outside the box. He takes you right over the edge of the rules and the way things are now to the way things could be."

"You had basically Newt's leadership team," explains LaBrache. "You had John Boehner engaged... You had Newt. They were all young rising stars within the party who were probably a little more conservative than Bob Michel who was the minority leader at that time. But, we're all looking at being sort of the next vision of what the Party needed to be.

"They had honed in on taxes, trade, making sure that the budget was balanced. John Kasich was part of that. All of these 35, 40, 45-year-old folks who had been in Congress, and who had picked the issues...saying, 'Security is important, our national defense is important, but we need to get our budget analyzed and taken care of. We need to take care of social issues.' They had gone down and started working through developing the Contract for America. Dick Armey was a part of that. Tom DeLay was a part of that. So, it was all these minds getting together, and Newt leading the pack saying, 'We need ten things. Let's go through and pick out the ten that we think would be the easiest to talk about that the public would latch onto and makes more sense... That the woman laying in bed at night, who was maybe a single mom, what would her concerns be? And if you have a 10-second or 30-second spot, what can you say?'"

The Republican Party realized it too had a rising star in Jennifer Dunn. She was someone who could soften issues and reach women. "She was an articulate speaker," says political colleague Slade Gorton. "They could put her out front in something and have her speak to it – an attractive spokesperson who was going to do the job right because she knew something about it."

Dunn worked welfare reform urging women to identify fathers of children so parents foot the bill, “That is where the responsibility should be, on the parents of the child, not on the state or the federal government, or the people I represent that have to pay taxes.”

During the 1996 campaigns, Dunn traveled the country making her signature speech: **“What the GOP has done for Women.”**

“When women back home in my district talk to me about what this Congress is doing these days, I tell them that Congress is dealing with the very problems that women are concerned about.

Well, what is it that we women care about?

We want opportunity for ourselves and our families;

We want some sense that there will be a retirement system we can count on.

We want a healthy environment.

We want a good education for our children.

We want personal safety.

We want health care security.

We want the folks who really need help in our society to get that help.

We want homemaker IRAs, because we know that the work done inside the home is every bit as important, if not more important, as the work done outside the home.

What has the Republican Congress done to answer these needs?

This Congress has indeed been supportive of women and the family. We passed a \$500 per child tax credit; We passed marriage penalty tax relief; We passed tougher laws on sexual predators and stalkers; We are supporting employees having the option of selecting either time-off or cash instead of overtime wages. For too long parents have had to choose between work and spending time with their children. A working mother may prefer to see her daughter in a school play rather than be paid time and a half for staying at her job. She should have that choice...

Look at what we’ve passed:

- *regulatory relief*
- *paperwork reduction and elimination*
- *health care deductibility for the self employed*
- *we ensured the solvency of the principal lending programs at SBA*
- *we made tax compliance for “S” Corporations less complicated*
- *we provided small businesses the ability to quickly write-off the money they spend on practical things like computers and office furniture*

In fact, if Congress gets its way - and President Clinton keeps his veto pen in his pocket – women business owners can expect sustained growth, more jobs and better wages...sounds a bit like the American Dream, doesn't it?

I've found that my women friends at home in Washington State care about the very same things that this Republican Congress does: helping families keep more of their paychecks so they can decide how to do more for their families and their communities; saving Medicare for our parents and welfare for the folks who are truly in need, and encouraging local answers as we solve the problems of increasing crime, and declining education and protecting the environment.

Our solutions are not complicated. Our solutions do not require Congressional studies, or Committee Hearings or "expert" testimony.

Our solution is to listen.

I've have found that if you listen to the American woman and respect her advice, the answers are all right there."

Personally, however, 1996 was a difficult year. Dunn lost her father, John Charles Blackburn, "Jack", on October 3, 1996.

"I miss him a lot," Dunn said thoughtfully in the months following his death.

The rise of Jennifer Dunn

After selling the Republican Party to women and families along the campaign trail, veteran Jennifer Dunn returned to the nation's capital in 1997 for her third term as the 8th District U.S. Representative. Without question, Dunn epitomized a star on the rise.

"She had a tremendous personal flair and she was extremely good looking," says Gorton. "I doubt there was another female in the House of Representatives like her. She dressed up and you always knew where to find her in a crowd. She just wowed the males in the Republican Party and the House of Representatives. And when you add to that she was smart as all hell, a Stanford graduate and extremely bright... But she didn't talk over people. She didn't leave people feeling that she thinks she is a lot smarter than they are."

Dunn set high expectations and maintained a hectic schedule flying back to the state of Washington twice every month. The pace caught the attention of the *Post-Intelligencer's* David Horsey in 1997. "It's not easy to book time with Dunn, a woman whose days are even more tightly packed than the typically manic schedule of the average member of Congress. A talk with her in an ornate anteroom in the capitol is constantly interrupted by her quick trips next door for votes on the House floor and by aides rushing in with updates of her constantly revised daily schedule.

"The fast pace matches the quick rise Dunn has made into the top echelon of power in the House. She is the Republican Party's Golden Girl, on prominent display at party functions, downright glamorous in her knit dresses, jewelry and blonde hair, a distinct contrast to all the men in their blue and gray power suits – just what the party with the gender gap problem needs."

By this time, her legislative style had become art. Her ability to speak publicly effectively was duly noted by the powers that be in the Republican Party.

“I’m out there talking to people, listening to people, asking how we’re doing, finding out what we should be doing on their behalf,” Dunn said. “It’s important always to read your group... important to listen, talking the vision of the country, why Republicans are different than Democrats, limited government. People should do what they can do first – then government.

“I like to involve a lot of stories in my speeches. I like to personalize things a lot.”

There was no holding her back. The Republican Party was reelected a majority for the first time in sixty years. Dunn herself was elected Vice Chair of the House Republican Conference, a crucial position that manages weekly meetings and disseminates information to Republican members nationwide – guiding them in their talks with constituents back home. The powerful Dunn became the fifth-ranking person in GOP leadership and one of the highest ranking women in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“I always felt more comfortable in leadership. That gives you the standing to make a difference. That’s been the most important thing for me,” Dunn said.

Dunn became a point of interest in national politics as reporters dug below the surface to learn the personal side of the congresswoman.

“I do a lot of sports activities,” the congresswoman told C-SPAN. “Where I come from everybody is an outdoorsman. Everybody is an environmentalist. I ski. I scuba dive. I’m a swimmer. I used to teach swimming. I like my garden. For me, it’s nourishment. You’ve got to find those things that give you the energy to go on with what for me is a very demanding job.”



Jennifer Dunn relishes the beauty of the outdoors in her home state of Washington. *Dunn family photo.*

The face of the Republican Party

Aspiring for more, Dunn became the first woman in American history to make a run for House Majority Leader. If she clinched the number two post in 1998, she would rank only behind the Speaker in the House hierarchy.

“Think of Margaret Thatcher without the accent and a better wardrobe and a bit more subtlety,” said candid radio commentator and onetime candidate for Governor, John Carlson.

U.S. Rep Rick White called her “very persuasive and captivating” someone who “functions particularly well in a male environment... I think they find her attractive.”

But it was not to be. Dunn eventually lost to Dick Armey of Texas but harbored no bitter feelings of any kind.

“(The President) shall from time to time give to the Congress Information on the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient....” Article II, Sec. 3, U.S. Constitution.

The State of the Union

Few opportunities in politics carry the kind of star-making visibility generated by the State of the Union Address. The Presidential remarks, a time-honored tradition since 1790, are answered by an official response from the opposing political party. In 1999, the honor of delivering the opposing response fell to Washington Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn and her colleague, U.S. Representative Steve Largent of Oklahoma.

In many ways, Dunn had transformed into the House “It Girl.” This appearance would only help her visibility. After all, the broadcast would take her into the living rooms of constituents and perfect strangers, into bars and restaurants all over the country, and onto congested highways where radio stations would air the address as cars and buses whizzed by during breaks from punishing gridlock.

Since the Address was first televised in 1966, only a handful of women – and even fewer Washingtonians – have delivered the opposing response. Dunn was about to make history. Additionally, the 1999 Address came at an interesting time. President Bill Clinton, on trial in the U.S. Senate, had been impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives for perjury, obstruction of justice, and abuse of power following a scandalous affair with a White House intern that put American politics on the world stage. (Dunn eventually would vote to impeach President Clinton.)

On a winter evening, in the midst of this political roller coaster before the American public, Clinton delivered the State of the Union Address to millions.



President Bill Clinton delivering the 1999 State of the Union Address. National Archives and Records Administration photo.

“Tonight I stand before you to report that America has created the longest peacetime economic expansion in our history – with nearly 18 million new jobs, wages rising at more than twice the rate of inflation, the highest homeownership in history, the smallest welfare rolls in 30 years – and the lowest peacetime unemployment since 1957,” the country’s president said in a message that ran more than an hour.

Dunn, labeled in the media a “smooth referee” earned the title that night, telling the American public: “No matter what the outcome of the President’s situation, life in America

will go on. Our lives will continue to be filled with practical matters, not constitutional ones.” Dunn called for tax relief and even got personal.

“I’ve been a single mother since my boys were little – six and eight. My life in those days was taken up trying to make ends meet, trying to get to two soccer games at the same time on two different fields, worrying about dropping the boys off early at school in order for me to get to work on time. I know how that knot in your stomach feels. I’ve been there.”



“I know how that knot in your stomach feels,” said an empathetic Dunn that night. “I’ve been there.” Jennifer Dunn, Republican Response to the State of the Union Address, 1999.

While many were impressed with the handling of the State of the Union response, Dunn’s comment minimizing the impact of the president’s scandal angered others and made *The New York Times*.

“In their State of the Union response, Mr. Largent, of Washington, and Representative Jennifer Dunn of California infuriated many moralists who are indignant about Mr. Clinton’s conduct; the lawmakers played down the scandal and underscored the bedrock Republican issues. ‘Our country is not in crisis,’ Ms. Dunn said. ‘There are no tanks in the street.’”

The making of a President: “I remember hearing Karl Rove talking about the new Governor of Texas and that he had an 80 percent approval rating or something like that.”

After eight years of Democratic Party rule, the Republican faithful were out for blood. It was the start of a new millennium and Democrat Bill Clinton, the third youngest American president at the time, prepared to exit the country’s top post after a volatile two terms. The Republicans mobilized for a swift takeover. To galvanize support in Washington State, they positioned a bankable U.S. Representative known for her grace as much as her smarts.

And on a summer day in 2000, Representative Dunn took center stage, this time in Philadelphia as one of three Republican co-chairs at the Republican National Convention. Just two days after her birthday, she addressed a rousing crowd of the party faithful and a distinguished list of honorable guests. At the time, the political grapevine buzzed with talk that a win for Republican contender George W. Bush could lead to a win for Dunn – a cabinet post possibly as Commerce Secretary in his Administration.

“Representative Jennifer Dunn of Washington, a member of the Republican House

leadership and a deputy convention co-chair, was positively buoyant,” observed *The New York Times*. “She said George W. Bush was strong on issues that deal with women, citing his plans for Social Security reform as an example.

‘Husbands tend to die seven or eight years earlier than their wives, so Social Security reform is beneficial for women,’ she said. She was also a big fan of Dick Cheney. ‘He is married to a powerful woman, and he knows he needs to listen to a powerful woman,’ she said.”

After her part in the convention, Dunn participated in a chat on the Women’s Vote with Lifetime Television about the approval ratings of both presidential contenders. While “Bush had a nine-point lead over Gore among women voters after the Republican National Convention, Gore’s approval skyrocketed to an 18-point lead after the Democratic National Convention. “That’s a huge shift,” pointed out ABC’s Carter Yang during the chat. But Dunn was ready.

“As we moved to the conventions, Governor Bush’s support was ninety-four percent of his base. As Gore moved to the convention, Gore’s support was seventy percent of his base. Therefore, there was greater room for increase in his support from his base. And I think that’s a generic comment, it’s not just women... I think it was the first opportunity for busy women to focus in on Al Gore, and it paid off for him. We are seeing that lead, by the way, diminish among women, and you will see that continue as you capture through the polls his appearances on “Oprah” and so forth. ”

Two days later on August 2, 2000, Dunn took part in a CNN interview originally set to discuss the convention. But at 87, Gerald Ford who became the country’s 38th president after Richard Nixon resigned in the throes of Watergate, had suffered a stroke. “We had planned to have you here to talk about the convention and what lies ahead,” clarified Special Correspondent Frank Sesno. “I hope we’ll get to some of that. But first I do want to ask you your thoughts on Gerald Ford and his condition. And have you had an opportunity to speak with him in the last couple of days?”

“Yes, I have,” replied a subdued Dunn. “I’m very saddened by this. I happened, coincidentally, to be in the holding room last night to talk with Nancy Reagan about a proposal that we have passed through the Congressional body to award a Congressional Gold Medal to President and Mrs. Reagan. And I had a chance to speak to President Ford. And as always, when we talked, he was very interested in what was happening politically in Washington State because we were a state that went for Gerald Ford in ‘76 by 4 1/2 points. And he remembers that campaign and he wanted to know how it was going. He looked very good to me, very healthy, strong, alert, very interested.”

“And you did not detect any problems? He didn’t talk to you about not feeling well?” asked Sesno. “Not a thing, no,” Dunn replied. “He was seated. He got up to greet me and he seemed very well. So, whatever happened I suspect happened afterward. Obviously, we’re very worried.”

“There was, of course, a great tribute to all the former presidents last night, he among them,” Sesno continued. “To what extent do this group and this convention here reach back to him and his era for where it is today?” “I think we’re very proud of what he did,” expressed Dunn. “He brought back into government a sense of calm and control. We’d been through a very turbulent time and he was elected because he was somebody who had stayed above the fray. So, that’s a portion of our history that we remember well. He was the one who moved us away from that.

“We remember him with great pride. He’s been so involved ever since he was the president. He’s appeared on behalf of candidates year after year and he gives very funny speeches. He raises a lot of money for candidates. But mostly, he and his wife are great role models for people. I mean, she was the first person who really openly, as a first lady, spoke about breast cancer. And of course that’s something we work on very hard in Congress, to fund programs for the National Institutes of Health.”

“You know we were looking at that video of the interview that Wolf Blitzer conducted with the former president last night,” added Meserve. “He said, ‘You know, I’m looking forward... (the former president did)... to doing everything I can to bring about this new vision of the Republican Party.’ In fact, he has sort of stood for a more moderate, soft-spoken Republican Party for quite some time, hasn’t he?”

“Yes,” agreed Dunn. “He was known for that. And his aura, the way he is, his style is a lovely style. It’s not confrontational. He likes to take on opposition candidates on issues, and we need to do more of that. That’s what this convention is about here. I mean, we’re talking about a really a softer side of the conservative message, the same principles, but you can do it with a smile, as Gerald Ford did and Ronald Reagan did and George Bush does.

“And I think we’re also connecting very well with women and others who don’t have time in their everyday lives to study policy. But the stories in this convention – I noticed when Condoleezza Rice spoke, for example, she related her career to what happened to her

grandfather. People like that sort of narrative and it helps them connect with policies. I think we’re being very successful at doing that in this convention.”

As Co-chair of Victory 2000, Dunn again took the stage in her hometown of Bellevue on October 31, 2000 and proudly held up three fingers. The party faithful packed Bellevue Community College and listened as Dunn delivered the George W. Bush



Jennifer Dunn campaigns with then-Governor George W. Bush at Boeing Field. The Governor takes questions on Northwest Salmon. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer photo.*

campaign mantra: “W stands for women!” she shouted to rousing groups of Republicans as they cheered. The “W Stands for Women” tour traveled from coast to coast drumming up female support in an attempt to send the popular governor of the Lone Star State to the White House eight years after his father left the presidency. Washington was considered a battleground state and in the final days of the campaign, the Bush presence in the Northwest was critical.

Dunn’s connection to the future president was cemented over an evening dinner in Austin, Texas in December, 1998. “Well, I got to really liking George W. Bush as a governor, and I sold Mom on the idea of trying to get involved early in his race,” says Reagan. “So, she flew down to Austin.”

“I very much liked the way he listened to his wife,” Dunn told reporter Dave Ammons in an interview on TVW. “His wife thought a run for the presidency would be fun. I knew I could raise money for him.”

“He held her hand, and they would look at each other and talk. She thought the marriage was very good, and that mattered to her, and so she signed up to be one of the ten members of his steering committee, his exploratory committee,” Reagan finishes.

There was something else. Bush relayed to Dunn his acceptance of single motherhood. “There can be as much love in a family with a single mother as a family with two parents.”

“He would say things in ways that I thought them,” said Dunn. It was really quite remarkable. I just felt so committed to him by the time the evening was over.”

“The presidential race came around,” recalls Reagan. “So she was on the exploratory committee with guys like James Baker.

“One thing people talk about – she was an incredible fundraiser. And in politics that mattered. She raised *millions* for President Bush, millions, many millions. And that gave her a favored status,” Reagan says.

“We turned back the McCain onslaught in 2000 in this state,” he continues. “So when the White House came about, she was held very highly.”

But no cabinet post came to be. “The issue at that time was this district, 8th Congressional had swung, as a swing district, it became a centralist district, and the president was, and Karl Rove was reluctant to pull her out of a district that they thought they might have a hard time keeping,” explains Reagan. “And instead of getting the



“He would say things in ways that I thought them,” Dunn said of her connection to George W. Bush.

cabinet post... she would always sit next to the president when she went to the White House, all that stuff. But she was asked to hold the seat essentially.”

Regardless, Dunn maintained her credibility. “And when she walked into a room and she met with major donors, when she met with CEOs, when she was meeting with leaders of state both in politics and internationally... she was absolutely prepared. She was articulate. Yes, (she was) elegant. (She) knew when to listen. Her political acumen... they would look at her and say, ‘We need to be paying attention to her. Jennifer knows what she’s doing,’” recalls LaBrache. “She had such good friends all up and down the levels of politics, from state all the way up to the president’s office – courthouse to the White House. That she was *so well* thought of. And knew that if Jennifer said she would do something, it was done. It was promised and it was done right, there was never having to go back and do anything a second time. And that’s one of the other key lessons that she taught me is, ‘Never make decisions in haste.’ And when you do something, you *always* do it absolutely to the best of your ability. *Never* turn in second. Never say, ‘It’s good enough.’”

Her success and stature did not put an end to the Good Old Boys Club she dealt with every day of her career.

“You always had to watch to make sure that they didn’t forget you,” continues LaBrache. “You know guys, they have a tendency sometimes, ‘Oh yeah, we’ll get together and talk about this.’ The idea of having a woman in the room, even when it was Jennifer, sometimes it just didn’t occur to them. So, she always had to be out there, and make sure her staff was out there, listening for things, hearing things, and making sure that she walked in the door at the right moment and said, ‘Hey guys, here I am. Let’s start the conversation.’”

As she had in all re-elections, Dunn reclaimed her office by a wide margin in 2000. With more than 62 percent of the vote, she sailed into her fifth term in office by voter mandate.

But the race for president was wholly another matter. The long and controversial election night snowballed into one of the most contested elections in American history. Election night itself kept Americans on edge. Network news blunders over which presidential candidate carried Florida and had therefore won the highest office in the land were some of the most glaring in recent memory and seared into the minds of an often skeptical American public. The networks miscalled the race – not once, but twice. “We have egg on our face,” ABC News Anchor Sam Donaldson said candidly after the error. “No question about it.”

The close race kept on. From coast to coast, Americans waited to find out who would become their next Commander-in-Chief. The close vote triggered a machine recount and litigation. Katherine Harris, Florida Secretary of State, came under fire for a myriad of decisions; she was also co-chair of the Bush campaign in Florida.

Once again, Dunn found herself front and center, speaking on behalf of Republicans, as the nation raged over the election.

For PBS, Jim Lehrer addressed the congresswoman on December 5 as the presidency hung in the balance and the courts decided if and how recounts should continue.

“Congresswoman Dunn: Are the Republicans prepared to do the same thing if, for instance, the Florida Supreme Court does rule for the Gore position and says, ‘Let’s count 10,000 votes; let’s count 14,000 votes,’ or whatever, are the Republicans willing to go with that?”

“Well, of course, Jim,” Dunn replied. “We’re in this one for the long run. We believe we had a wonderful day yesterday in court. And I have consistently felt that as we prepare to govern this country, and we’re losing day by day that precious time to do a serious transition effort, that Vice President Gore has had a couple of opportunities to take the high road. I continue to think that as we move through this process and we go from one recount to the next recount with Governor Bush winning every single one of these that it would be very much the high road and I think a note of grace out of this for Al Gore to say to his lawyers, “enough, this is over, we should not go on and I want to do what’s best for the country.” But certainly Republicans have been on board the Bush campaign for so long, early committed, and are looking forward to helping to run this country, we’ll be in there for the long run.”

The case climbed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Ultimately, the landmark court decision in *Bush v. Gore* put a halt to a statewide hand recount, handed the presidency to George W. Bush, and helped define what constitutes a legal vote in future elections.

Dunn for U.S. Senate?

With her high profile intensifying each day, talk circulated that the White House was grooming Dunn for bigger and better things. Namely, to oust the state of Washington’s self-described “mom-in-tennis shoes” Patty Murray from the powerful U.S. Senate, especially given Murray’s well-publicized gaff in a school classroom “in which she said she understood why certain parts of the world have been receptive to Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda terrorist network,” as *Roll Call* reported at the time.

With an urging from George W. Bush to take on the famous senator, Dunn became the talk of both Washingtons. A win seemed plausible. A Republican poll showed Dunn just four points shy of Murray – within the statistical margin of error.

But a shot at the upper house didn’t appeal to Dunn. “Dunn Expected to Skip Senate Bid” announced *Roll Call* on April 10, 2003.

“We’ve been blessed in the state of Washington because we’ve had two potentially outstanding candidates in Congresswoman Dunn and Congressman Nethercutt,” said Dan Allen, communications director for the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

The congresswoman preferred the Ways & Means Committee. While the House runs on merit, the Senate runs on seniority. It would take too long to make a real difference, assessed Dunn. On the longevity of her own career in the House, Dunn said

simply: “I know when the time is up and my constituents will know when the time is up.”

George Nethercutt, who in 1994 defeated Tom Foley, arguably one of the most powerful Washingtonians in political history, took on Murray in 2004 but lost big. Nethercutt claimed just 43 percent of the vote, twelve points behind his opponent.

The estate tax: “The death tax deserves to die.”



Dunn family photo.

Far from a confusing haze of mind-numbing statistics and IRS regulations, the push to repeal the federal inheritance tax took center stage and may be the hallmark of Jennifer Dunn’s career. It was the issue championed every day of her Congressional life.

Proponents characterized the repeal as a lifeline for grieving families who were taxed so unfairly when loved ones died, they were forced to sell their businesses just to pay Uncle Sam. Opponents branded the repeal as a financial tax break for the filthy rich, and legislation that would compromise charitable giving and unjustifiably promote American dynasties. The battle cut beneath American tax laws to American values, fairness, and justice.

“How is it that the estate tax, which has been on the books continuously since 1916 and is paid by only the wealthiest two percent of Americans, was repealed in 2001 with broad bipartisan support?” pondered authors Michael Graetz and Ian Shapiro in *Death by a Thousand Cuts: The Fight over Taxing Inherited Wealth*. After all, they pointed out, the repeal did not pass in “the dead of night like a Congressional pay raise.”

On February 25, 1999, a poised and experienced Jennifer Dunn proposed an end to the country’s longstanding estate tax that first breathed life during the naval war with France in 1797. “Although it was repealed within 6 years in each of the first three instances, in 1916 the federal government put its hand in the pocket of Americans to fund WWI and never took it out,” asserted Dunn who’s proposed phase-out slashed the tax an additional 5 percent over the course of a decade.

“Mr. Speaker, it’s been said that only with our government are you given a ‘certificate at birth, a license at marriage, and a bill at death.’ Today I am introducing the Death Tax Elimination Act, which seeks to phase-out the onerous death tax.

“In an era when the productivity of American workers is creating huge budget surpluses, it is incomprehensible for this tax to live on. The death tax deserves to die.”

In the book, Dunn is characterized as a sharply-dressed, smooth negotiator who is “indeed, striking, utterly poised, and ready for any question... Jennifer Dunn barely resembles the soccer mom the Republican Party selected to respond to President Clinton’s State of the Union address in January 1999 – just after the start of his impeachment trial,” say the authors referencing a cartoon on her wall in which Dunn “stands in a lifeboat

aiming her harpoon at a huge whale named “Death Tax,” which is swallowing up a little fish labeled ‘small business.’”

Dunn sold an issue well that had the potential to bore and leave the public perplexed. For starters, she argued, the death tax was not solely about money. Instead, Dunn made her case on behalf of a typical American family targeted unjustly by Uncle Sam. She accused the government of taking more than half of an inheritance at someone’s death and promoting a “me-first” attitude. More than 70 percent of businesses fold after a single generation because the taxes are too steep, she said definitively. Simply put, said Dunn, the death tax halts the transfer of wealth until Uncle Sam is paid his due.

The long-running battle took place over years, and if nothing else, proved a testament to her stamina. In the fall, *The Seattle Times* Publisher Frank Blethen hired an aide whose top assignment was repealing the national estate tax. Blethen said the tax harms family-owned businesses like the *Times*. Dunn joined the publisher in carefully portraying the issue to the public. She reportedly was not initially in favor of using the term “death tax” because the phrase didn’t sit well with women. “It worked really well with those we needed to influence,” she said in *Death by a Thousand Cuts*.

“She got it passed in the House *eight* times,” marveled LaBrache. “It was the Senate that kept falling down on the job.”

Legislation sponsored by Dunn survived Congress and worked its way to the desk of then-President Bill Clinton. But the “death tax” was part of a larger tax relief bill that Clinton vetoed on September 23, 1999.

Dunn kept at it. One of the most impassioned days in Congress on the revived push to repeal the death tax took place in the year 2000.

That spring, House Republicans rallied on the steps of the Capitol fresh off of a victory: U.S. Representatives had supported a repeal of the death tax.

“What a pleasure it is to be part of this celebration of what Republicans have been able to do in this Congress,” said Dunn. “Three weeks ago, 279 Members of Congress including 65 Democrats voted to abolish the unfair death tax. The fact that one in three Democrats joined all of the Republicans on this vote shows that this isn’t a partisan issue anymore. This is a fairness issue. They all believe that death should not be a taxable event.

“Parents work hard during their lives, many just in order for the children who follow them. As a result, death tax is their enemy.”

Dunn also shot down claims by opponents that the estate tax only impacts “2-percent of the country who happen to be rich.” The compliance tax, she argued, is how families protect themselves from the estate tax and paid by many. The money goes to lawyers, accountants, and insurance agents to protect them from death taxes that can range as high as 55 percent of the assets accumulated during the lifetime of the owner. “The compliance tax will never show up in IRS data,” said Dunn. “But I can tell you, it places a huge burden on the folks who have to spend these dollars.

“Just look up and down Main Street in any town. Family-owned businesses are threatened by the unfair death tax whether it’s the community newspaper, the local auto dealer, or the local hardware store. We in the House have done our job now. It’s now up to the Senate.”

On July 14, the U.S. Senate voted in favor of the appeal. The bill was set to be driven to the White House by a Montana farmer in a tractor, showing its impact on growers, but rumors of a Clinton veto continued to swirl.

“The more people learn about the dangerous exploding nature of this tax plan, the less they like it,” said White House spokesman Jake Siewert in a report by ABC News. “We think you could do more targeted estate tax relief that takes care of the small businesses and family farms.”

On August 31, Clinton vetoed the repeal saying proponents had painted an inaccurate picture of the legislation.

“I vetoed it not because I don’t think there should be any estate tax changes,” the president admitted. “I do think there should be some changes.” But Clinton said the repeal failed a “test of the future.” “This is \$750-billion for 54,000 families,” he stated, and a bill the country could simply not afford.

Emotions run wild: “This is the bill to help them out Mr. President and you vetoed it! And you looked at them right in the eye and you said, ‘You don’t count!’ Well, they do count!!”

Clinton’s veto pen sent the estate tax back to the U.S. House of Representatives on September 7, 2000, where it became the subject of political crossfire.

U.S. Representative Wally Herger, from California, took the floor. “Mr. Speaker, Americans are being taxed at the highest rate since World War II. The worst example of this is the death tax.” “These hard-working Americans deserve tax fairness.”

Emotional and passionate, Illinois Congressman Don Manzullo recalled a trip to a local auction where he watched the gavel fall on a centennial farm and slash its value in half. In a dramatic moment, Manzullo accused the president of misjudging the farmers of America.

“They’re not rich!” he shouted in a quavering voice, his arms shaking in frustration. “They put the food on the table of America. Mr. President, look at them in the eyes! The ones who get up real early and work 20 hours a day crying out for help! America’s farmers are being called rich and insignificant. This is the bill to help them out Mr. President and you vetoed it! And you looked at them right in the eye and you said, ‘You don’t count!’ Well, they do count!! The Crosses, the Buttes, the Wilmarts ... the little people across the world that put the food on the table. They’re America’s farmers.” But Manzullo did not get the last word.

“The plan that you have offered will take ten years to phase in to help those farmers that you just talked about,” countered Democrat Minority Whip Richard Bonior. “The plan that WE have been talking about and WE have been arguing for will cover up

to \$4-million in exemptions for business and for farmers like you've just described. And it would take effect IMMEDIATELY."

When historians analyze the effort to repeal the estate tax, Bonior continued, they will say: "Never have so many spent so much time to give so much money to so very few." His constituents, he concluded, worry about better schools, a stronger social security system, and reducing the national debt.

"There aren't a heck of a lot of people telling us to put these priorities on the back burner so we can repeal the estate tax for the Bill Gateses of the world. Never mind that it will cost \$50-billion a year for the richest two-percent to get the benefits of this bill."

The debate shifted again with U.S. Representative Earl Pomeroy, a Democrat from North Dakota. He told the chamber he represented more production acres of agriculture than any other member of the House of Representatives.

"My, my, my... I've not heard so much concern about our family farmers in four terms in this Congress than I'm hearing in the course of this debate," he said with mocking indignation. "This isn't about family farms, but the richest people in America."

Washington Congressman Jack Metcalf took the floor arguing the death tax repeal was about "doing what's right" for the nation. "We must override this very unwise veto."

Republicans asserted the Democrats "immediate solution" only helped three-percent of the people who urgently need tax relief.

"In the land of the free and the home of the brave it is astonishing that we let people be taxed after they die," concluded U.S. Representative Bill Archer from Texas. "That's certainly not the American dream; it's a nightmare."

For all the emotion and passion on the floor, the effort to override Clinton's veto with a 2/3 majority vote failed and found Jennifer Dunn quiet.

But the year 2001 brought with it a new president, Republican George W. Bush, and a renewed effort to repeal the inheritance tax. Despite his promises on the campaign trail, in February, there were "signs of a retreat" by the Bush Administration.

"If Al Gore had been elected, we could have gotten exactly the same outcome," grumbled Dunn in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The Bush Administration had hired Democrat John Dilulio to manage certain initiatives and he reportedly lobbied against the repeal – earning a label as "a skunk at the picnic" on the issue. Other notables with deep pockets like Bill Gates Sr. and Warren Buffet came out against the repeal. "In Mr. Buffett's colorful analogy," reported *The New York Times*, "repealing the estate tax for the benefit of heirs of the rich would be like choosing the nation's Olympic team from among the children of past Olympic champions."

In March, Dunn and Representative John Tanner, a Tennessee Democrat, proposed the Death Tax Elimination Act of 2001 – a tax phase-out over ten years.

"The funeral home is no place for Uncle Sam to be collecting taxes from grieving families," said a determined Dunn in a press release issued by her office.

By April 4, the U.S. House of Representatives had voted again in favor of repeal by a 274-154 vote.

“This is the official start of the funeral procession of the death tax,” said Dunn. “I’m confident the White House will work with Congress on behalf of small-business owners and family farmers to eliminate the onerous death tax.

“The people who oppose repeal like to claim it will only benefit the rich. We know that this is untrue. This is a tax that punishes good behavior and rewards a die-broke ethic. It is tax on virtue. It is a tax on those that worked hard, saved well, and in most cases already paid taxes on their wealth one, perhaps twice.”

The estate tax was absorbed in a massive tax relief bill under George W. Bush. On May 16, 2001, in a roll call vote in the House, the Economic Growth and Tax Reconciliation Act of 2001 passed 230 to 197 (five who were present opted not to vote.) It passed the U.S. Senate on May 23, 2001 and was signed by President Bush on June 7 to sunset in 2010. The President said:

“Across the board tax relief does not happen often in Washington, D.C. In fact, since World War II, it has happened only twice: President Kennedy’s tax cut in the ‘60s and President Reagan’s tax cuts in the 1980s. And now it’s happening for the third time, and it’s about time.

“Tax relief makes the code...fair for small businesses and farmers and individuals by eliminating the death tax. (Applause.) Over the long haul, tax relief will encourage work and innovation. It will allow American workers to save more on their pension plan or individual retirement accounts. Tax relief expands individual freedom. The money we return, or don’t take in the first place, can be saved for a child’s education, spent on family needs, invested in a home or in a business or a mutual fund or used to reduce personal debt.”

Dunn did not rest on her laurels. One month after victory, she issued a statement announcing the push for permanent repeal. If Congress doesn’t act now, the death tax will be reincarnated and once again haunt American families. We owe it to our children and grandchildren to finish the job we started.”

The case for AMBER Alert: “They stole her body but not her soul.”

In 1996, nine-year-old Amber Hagerman pedaled her bicycle near her grandmother’s home in Arlington, Texas. Within eight minutes, a stranger emerged, plucked Hagerman from her bike, and pushed the screaming girl into a pickup truck.

“Please don’t hurt my baby,” Amber’s mother cried out in those crucial hours after



Dunn, a foremost expert on tax relief fights tirelessly to end the estate tax. *Library of Congress photo.*



Amber Hagerman, 1986-1996. "Wouldn't it be wonderful to never again name a piece of legislation after a child who has died?" insisted Dunn urging the swift passage of AMBER Alert legislation.

the 1996 abduction. "She's just an innocent child. Please, please bring her home safe. Please."

But in a matter of days after Hagerman vanished, she was found dead in a creek with slash marks to the neck. The killer stripped the child of all clothing, with the exception of a single sock.

The family, shell-shocked by tragedy, mourned the loss of Amber, while detectives and lawmakers debated over tools that may have kept the girl alive.

The murder of Amber Hagerman became the genesis of the AMBER Alert system, a communications network that broadcasts critical information about the abduction and the victim. The original AMBER Alert was valuable, Dunn believed, but not good enough.

"She viewed issues from the human perspective," explains Thomson of her passion for AMBER Alert. "First, she was a woman. Second, she was a mother."

Dunn was determined to expand AMBER Alert to every community in America, with good reason. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, most kidnappers are family relatives or "friends" of their victims. Stranger abductions occur far less frequently but "nine out of 10 victims are female, half are sexually assaulted, and three out of four are killed within three hours." In a stranger abduction in particular, every second counts.

It was in this vein that Dunn met Ed and Lois Smart, the parents of yet another missing child. But this time, the kidnapping victim disappeared in the middle of the night.

After handling odd jobs for the Smart family in Salt Lake City one day in 2001, Briand David Mitchell allegedly returned on June 5, 2002 and dragged 14-year-old Elizabeth from her bedroom at knifepoint. According to Elizabeth, who testified in federal court at Mitchell's competency hearing in 2009, the accused hauled her to a canyon in the mountains, performed a peculiar ceremony, and proclaimed her his wife.

For nine agonizing months, Elizabeth told the Court in 2009, Mitchell raped her as many as four times a day often chaining her to a tree. He and then-wife Wanda Barzee allegedly shuffled Smart from various outdoor settings and camps. At one point in San Diego, Mitchell was arrested for robbing a church and held for six days. Still, Elizabeth remained with Barzee, unaware. She was veiled, dressed in white loose robes and using the alias Augustine Marshall. "Anything I showed resistance or hesitation to, he would turn to me and say, 'The Lord has commanded you to do this. You have to experience the lowest form of humanity to experience the highest.'"

In the excruciating weeks that followed Elizabeth's 2002 abduction, Ed and Lois



Elizabeth Smart. In 2009, the now grown Utah woman testified against her alleged abductor to encourage the court to deem him fit to stand trial for the crime.

Smart described an intense pain dulled only by strong faith and a global outpouring of support. Tens of thousands of letters arrived from people all over the world, many of whom were children. Kids who were perfect strangers served as a beacon of hope. Even their niece, a child at the time of Elizabeth's disappearance, offered profound words. "They stole her body, but not her soul," she once told her aunt and uncle. Volunteers lined up by the thousands to help search for Elizabeth, her abductor, or any clues.

The Smarts managed to push forward through heart-wrenching emotion and special occasions with one child missing, and an empty seat at the dinner table. They lobbied Congress in what evolved into a political firestorm. In the throes of Elizabeth's disappearance, Ed and Lois Smart urged key U.S. Representatives to fast-track a bill that

would spread an emergency communication system to every community in America. The response system allowed information and images to broadcast from stations and highways in those first crucial moments after a kidnapping. At the time, the so-called "Amber Alert" did not reach every community.

"In 1999, 58,200 children were abducted in this country," said Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn in a 2003 column. "Half of these children were snatched in public areas such as parks or playgrounds."

On October 3, 2002, Dunn and Congressman Martin Frost co-authored AMBER Alert legislation to carry the network into every American community. They met with Ed and Lois Smart who were desperate to pass new laws while they searched for their missing child. Dunn hoped for passage in the House by year's end.

"The Dunn-Frost bill, or the 'National Amber Alert Network Act,' provides matching federal grant dollars for communities that choose to create an AMBER Alert program. Federal matching funds, for example, would be available to King County where an AMBER Alert plan is currently in preliminary planning stages," said Dunn.

But Ed Smart grew concerned that politicians were using AMBER Alert as a political football. They'd bundled the proposed network with other child protection legislation that hadn't garnered as much support. Smart was certain it would slow down passage and in doing so, risk lives.

"To us, it was that children's lives were truly being impacted because of the inability for Congress, I mean the whole process, to take the Amber Alert through," says Ed Smart today. "One day the Congresswoman, she was in the hearing or something. And the



Since his daughter's return, Ed Smart has dedicated much of his life to missing children. He travels the country to promote legislation that encourages their safe return.

National Criminal Justice Reference Service photo.

times that we had met her she was very gracious, and just really what you would hope what your congressperson, whether it was a woman or a man, would be. She said, 'Let me see if I can get a meeting set up with you and James Sensenbrenner.' Who was basically the head of the Judiciary Committee. And he, in essence, was the person who was holding it up because he wanted to see all of these other bills go through, and he knew that the AMBER Alert would pass, and so it was kind of one of these chokeholds."

In November of 2002, Dunn picked up the phone to call Sensenbrenner while Ed and Lois Smart waited in the same room. "She dialed up his office, and he answered the phone. Dunn said, 'I wanted to see if I could arrange a meeting for you to meet the Smarts.' And he didn't know that we were on speakerphone. And he said, 'You can tell those Smarts that I don't appreciate what they've done to me. I almost lost my campaign because of them.' Here we are with Congresswoman Dunn, and Lois and I are in complete disbelief. We didn't do anything."

"He never asked to meet with me," says Congressman James Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin. "I never had a request to meet with him *at all*."

The understandable drama that unfolded between parents reeling with the potential loss of their child and a politician convinced a larger crime protection bill was needed never rattled Dunn.

In fact, she is credited by both Sensenbrenner and Smart for moving the legislation forward regardless of the politics. "First, she was respected," admired Sensenbrenner. "And second, she was viewed as a go-to person who could get things done."

Noted *The Seattle Times* after Dunn's 2005 retirement, "When the abducted 15-year-old Elizabeth Smart was found alive last March, her father, Ed, publicly criticized the Wisconsin lawmaker. Dunn quickly called Ed Smart and told him not to say anything politically embarrassing. Though Dunn cared passionately about passing AMBER Alert, dinging a fellow Republican was not the way to do it, she said later."

On February 5, 2003, Ed and Lois Smart joined Dunn and Texas Congressman Martin Frost for the formal unveiling of \$25 million legislation that would take AMBER Alert to every corner of the nation. The same day, Washington State issued its first Amber Alert for an 8-year-old girl who vanished in Benton County.

"It is a sad irony that Washington State had an occasion today to launch its first

AMBER Alert,” said Dunn. “I pray that young Sofie Juarez is quickly returned to her family in Kennewick.”

Meanwhile, Elizabeth was strategizing to be freed. She told her alleged abductors that God was calling them back to Utah. Once they returned, someone recognized Mitchell as a suspect in the kidnapping and tipped off police. Mitchell, the target of a nine-month intense manhunt, was spotted roaming a suburban street with Smart and then-wife Barzee, not far from Elizabeth’s Salt Lake City home.

In March, Ed Smart received yet another phone call from police asking him to come to the station immediately. The calls had become almost routine. But this time, he was elated... stunned... and ultimately, brought to tears. Elizabeth Smart was nine months older, but safe now, and alive.

“I am elated to hear the wonderful news that Elizabeth has been reunited with her family. I will always respect Ed and Lois for their strength and faith throughout this 9-month ordeal,” said Congresswoman Dunn after Elizabeth was rescued.

A short time later, Ed Smart waded through a sea of reporters to waiting microphones. “You know,” he told the crowd, “there are a lot of parents out there that would like to have their child returned. When we have something such as the AMBER Alert, it is a first line of defense for parents. And to think that our politicians are holding this up. They are not being our representatives.”

“He got on national television and basically blamed me for his daughter’s kidnapping, and the kidnapping of every kid who met that fate in the country,” says Sensenbrenner.

The next day, a poised Jennifer Dunn made her own case for expanding AMBER Alert.

“AMBER Alert is very important,” she said. “What happened is a little girl came home. And we have proof that a system that energizes people, that gets information out, that shows faces of potential kidnappers, that perhaps portrays license plate numbers or descriptions of cars, certainly of the victim can work in the final game. We have saved 47 children through AMBER Alert.”

“There is no more important thing we can do in Congress, if it’s not help parents retrieve their lost children,” Dunn argued. “AMBER Alert will do that. Ed Smart, take heart,” she said. “We’re thinking of you. We’re sending you our love. We’re sending you our feelings of thankfulness that Elizabeth has come home. We wish that she is well. We’re so glad she is home in your arms.”

On March 27, 2003, Dunn spoke candidly in a speech to Congress. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful to never again name a piece of legislation after a child who has died?”

Just four weeks later, the long-awaited day arrived. Dunn, the Smarts, and Attorney General John Ashcroft looked on as President George W. Bush signed the Amber Alert legislation into law as part of the PROTECT Act of 2003. “Parents with young children have waited a long time for this day,” said Dunn. “A rewarding aspect of public service is to be a

part of legislation that will truly make a difference in people's lives. The AMBER Alert bill does just that. It is credited with helping to reunite 64 children with their parents. Now, every community throughout the nation will have access to this invaluable tool.

"This bill is the culmination of hard work from Republicans and Democrats, House and Senate Members, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and most importantly, Ed Smart. Ed took the traumatic experience of his daughter's abduction and turned it into a fight to help other parents of missing and abducted children."

Two years after Dunn's death, the case of Elizabeth Smart was still making its way through the court system. In 2009, the accused, a haggard and shackled Brian David Mitchell, shuffled to the defendant's chair of a U.S. District courtroom in Salt Lake City. Attorneys debated whether he was fit to stand trial for the kidnapping of Elizabeth Smart. He interrupted proceedings singing church hymns until the judge ordered him out. It was not the first time that Mitchell – a self-proclaimed prophet – erupted in song in the midst of a court proceeding.

No decision was reached. The fate of Brian David Mitchell and his alleged accomplice still hangs in the balance.

A great love

But for Jennifer Dunn, life in many ways had never been better. The personal life of Washington's notable Congresswoman had taken a dramatic turn. The romance between Jennifer Dunn and Keith Thomson began on the corner of 6th and Pennsylvania in Washington D.C. Once Cupid's arrow struck – neither ever looked back. Instant chemistry, shared interests, and mutual respect forged a powerful bond. It is the classic love story albeit with twists: the two met late in life; one was arguably the most powerful women in Washington State politics, and the other – a strapping Brit – notably accomplished in his own right.

A friend, former Washington State Senator Pat Hale played Cupid and suggested the two meet for a blind date. "Pat called Jennifer up and says, 'I have this guy I think you need to meet,'" remembers LaBrache. "She worked for Keith at Hanford," explained Dunn to TVW. "I hadn't seen him or met him. I hadn't heard his name."



President George W. Bush greets Elizabeth Smart and her mother Lois on the day AMBER Alert is signed into law, April 30, 2003. *Eric Draper, White House photo.*

At the time of their blind date, Thomson oversaw nuclear waste cleanup and 5,000 employees as President and CEO of Fluor Hanford in Richland, Washington. Fluor, a Fortune 500 Company on six continents, shouldered cleanup at the massive nuclear waste site. By the time he lived in dry Eastern Washington, Thomson's illustrious career had taken him to virtually every region of the world leading projects in Kuwait, Nigeria, Yemen, The Philippines, the UK, and the Middle East. While still in England, Thomson served on flying duties in England and Yemen as an officer in the Royal Air Force.

He had much in common with the well-travelled Jennifer Dunn. But Thomson says until they met in person, he'd never so much as seen a photograph of Dunn.

"I said, 'I'll call and make a reservation,'" explained Dunn of their phone conversation. "When you're a congressman they know you and they'll give you a good table. He said, 'No, I will. That's a man's job.' And I didn't say anything. That was strange too, that I was willing. Must have been that accent..."

They were perfect strangers, said Dunn, when they met at Capital Grille in Washington D.C. The Dunn haunt is famous for its breathtaking view of the Capitol, dry-aged steaks, and the caliber of its patrons. Here, someone on a dinner date can rub elbows with U.S. Senators, Members of Congress, and high-powered lobbyists walking to the rest room.

It was a lovely Washington evening as Thomson waited at the table for the Congresswoman.

"And I saw this little convertible come up and do a u-turn right in front of the policeman to park in the valet parking to get her keys and this gorgeous looking lady got out and walked toward the restaurant. And the rest is history," says Thomson. "She came in the restaurant and I'm fairly tall. And she said, 'Wow!' And I said, 'Wow too!' We went to the table and three hours later we were still talking."

Thomson lived in Eastern Washington at the time, near Hanford. Dunn maintained residences in both Washington D.C. and Washington State. They agreed to see one another again.

"The relationship was just absolutely teenager wonderful," jokes Thomson. "It was just super. It might sound trite. But it was that first time we sat down and just started talking. For me, it felt like we had known each other forever. There were no awkward moments; it flowed. It was wonderful. I felt we couldn't get enough time together and she felt the same.



"For me, it felt like we had known each other forever," Keith recounts. *Keith Thomson photo.*

“The chemistry, the physically chemistry, the intellectual chemistry, the like in the same sorts, the faith in each other and I was always so proud of her and yet she would say the same thing.”

“He called Jennifer,” adds LaBrache. “And said, ‘I had a wonderful time, it was great. I’d love to have an opportunity to see you again. I think it’s brilliant what you’re doing. And I’ve always been interested in politics. And I hope we can have a chance to meet again sometime.’

“And Jennifer was going home for August recess and there were a number of events that were going on that she had been invited to. So she told the scheduler, ‘Why don’t you call Keith Thomson and see if he’d like to come to one of these with me?’ And so the scheduler calls Keith and says, ‘The Congresswoman would like to know if you’d like to attend.’ And Keith said, ‘No, I don’t want to attend one of them.’ And she said, ‘Excuse me?’ And he said, ‘I’d like to attend *all* of them.’”

“She was intensely interested when she spoke to you,” says Thomson about those first moments in which he became smitten with the Congresswoman. “There was no one else in the world. She was looking at you and talking to you. She loves the fact that my



Dunn-Thomson family. Tulchan Lodge. Keith Thomson photo.

family sort of took her in. She had been a single mother with Reagan and Bryant growing up and suddenly she was just so absorbed into my family and she just loved them a lot. There was absolute concentration, it seemed, on me and she made me feel I was the most important

person to her. It wasn’t the politics or all the people she knew. She made me feel good and I felt the same way about her.

“Kathy Edwards – who was Dennis Dunn’s sister – said, ‘Look, they’re holding hands.’ She said, ‘Jennifer never held hands with anyone.’ We were holding hands. There was a lot of holding, a lot of touching, and that sort of thing. It was very sweet,” Thomson finishes.

“I never knew her happier,” Congressman Doc Hastings informed the church at Dunn’s memorial. “And the love between them was evident to all.”

Dunn was equally smitten with the Brit who grew up in England and joined the Royal Air Force for eight years. He immigrated to the United States in 1964. Thomson spent

the next forty years in engineering and construction. For three years, he worked at Hanford overseeing cleanup.

“We were all so happy when she found happiness at the end of her life with Keith,” says longtime U.S. Senator Slade Gorton. “Keith was a great guy and they were just starting that life together and she so tragically left us. But it’s obvious though she never talked about it, never showed people like me in some respects how personally lonely she was for a very very significant number of years. And then, relatively suddenly, that all ended. She was so very, very happy for that last two or three years. I know I just share this with so many other people. All of the people I think were so delighted by that change.”

At the time, Thomson was father to Angus and step-father to two sons (to become four when he and Jennifer married) and one daughter. Before long, Dunn and Thomson were caught up in a whirlwind romance that blossomed into marriage.

“She’s a water baby,” says Thomson. “She was a swimmer at Stanford and she loved it. I have a boat that I kept down



A new life for Jennifer Dunn. Keith Thomson photo.

in the Virgin Islands, so we went down and spent some time on my boat. I asked her to marry me as we pulled in to St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I made a reservation at a restaurant called Black Beard’s Castle and so we were having dinner there and it was just looking out over the Caribbean at this old Pirate’s castle and lovely dinner, and I did the traditional thing, I went down on one knee and asked her if she would marry me. She

hesitated about half a second,” he remembers laughing warmly.

On November 16, 2003, Keith Thomson married Jennifer Blackburn Dunn in a lovely ceremony on Mercer Island. The bride wore a periwinkle gown and held a beautiful bouquet of her favorite peach-colored flowers.

“I always thought she was the brightest, most intelligent, most beautiful. She would say, “Oh, no. You’re the bright one, you’re the



The wedding, November 16, 2004. Dunn family photo.

handsome one,” says Thomson looking back at their brief marriage. “It’s funny.”

“But I came back to Washington D.C.,” explains Thomson. “The Bush Administration asked me to join the Department of Homeland Security. I had some particular qualifications that seemed to be able to help there and so for 3 years I was the Assistant Commissioner for U.S. Customs and Border Protection.”

Dunn still held a powerful position in Congress and represented Washington as a senior delegate. But the influential politician decided her time in Congress was running out.

A new chapter for Jennifer Dunn: “I think she knew she wasn’t going to do it forever.”

In a move that stunned the political establishment, Jennifer Dunn decided to call it quits and put an end to her Congressional career. Though some in Washington D.C. were aware of Dunn’s decision to retire, they kept it quiet until she could tell her constituents and friends at home.

“You and I have a rendezvous with destiny....” Dunn began in a letter to friends. At a reception for her key longtime supporters, Dunn was uncharacteristically unable to



Air Force One. Dunn family photo.

talk. Her husband read the letter that touted her achievements – highlighting the Sunshine Laws she helped enact “which brought Congressional deal making out from behind closed doors and helped restore some measure of trust in the People’s House.”

When Dunn exited public service, the country had once again elected a Republican president and the GOP controlled both chambers.

“She always said that she thought that she believed that a Member of Congress starts to fade after 10 years,” says Reagan of his mom’s decision to leave political life. “There are experiments and studies out there that say the effectiveness of a Member of Congress starts to fade after 10 years. Twelve years seems like a good time to hang it up. She always talked about 12 years as being the appropriate time to hang it up. And as it turned out, she met somebody right around year 10 or 11 of her time, right around her fifth term. So, I think what really happened is she got that ring on her finger and she said, ‘I’m tired of all the B.S. This is crazy. I’ve done what I can. It’s very difficult to continue to run, and fly back and forth every week.’ And she said, ‘Okay. I’ve paid my time. I’ve got a lifetime of service, and I’m going to do different stuff.’”

According to *The Washington Post*, the last vote Jennifer Dunn cast in Congress was

in favor of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act.

“Loyalty marked her tenure,” published *The Seattle Times*. “Her influence extends farther than Washington State,” remarked 30-year friend and Republican ally Doc Hastings. “She was steadfast on the death tax and carried that from Day One.”

“Jennifer Dunn is a good friend and an outstanding public servant,” President George W. Bush stated from the White House. “For more than a decade, she has delivered results for the people of Washington State. She has championed sound policies that encourage economic growth and create jobs. She has led the way in providing tax relief for the American people; promoting the advancement of small and women-owned businesses; helping America’s children, including by sponsoring the Amber Alert bill; and protecting the environment. She is a superb legislator and a strong leader who has stood for the best of Washington State’s values and who has improved the lives of its people. Laura and I are grateful for Jennifer’s friendship, and we extend our best wishes to her, her husband Keith, and her two sons.”

“I think she had a good perspective on it,” says Reagan. “I think she knew she wasn’t going to do it forever. I think she knew very clearly that what she did was for the best interest

of the community. She really felt a responsibility to serve the public well, and then when she was done with that she’d do something else. So, you know, I remember her in moments of weakness, and moments of doubt, and moments of hardship, especially in some of the tougher campaigns. But overall, I think she had the right perspective on it.

“And one of the ways you know she had the right perspective on it was she voluntarily hung it up when she felt like she was done serving. You see these people who are indicted, caught in an affair, have \$90,000 dollars in their fridge, driving a Rolls Royce and they’re unwilling or unable to hang up their power. And that’s because they are in it for the wrong reasons. Mom voluntarily said, I’ve had it, six terms in Congress, I could have assumed a post to



Emerging from his mother’s shadow. Reagan Dunn holds a seat on the King County Council. *Dunn family photo.*

the president, I’ve got a great career and I think it’s time for me to step aside and let someone else come in and take my place. So she did that, and that isn’t easy because that kind of power is hard to give up for *most* people, but she did it. She found somebody she cared about, she decided she was done.”

“Rather than campaign for myself,” said Dunn in her closing letter,” as Chair of President Bush’s re-election committee, I will devote my time and energy to ensuring his re-election and making sure that he has a Republican Governor, U.S. Senator, and a Representative from our 8th District who will support his efforts to strengthen America.

“It has been a deep honor and a remarkably rewarding experience to serve as your voice in the House of Representatives... Together, we had our rendezvous with destiny.”

At a roast with former Washington Governor Gary Locke, her protégé John Carlson stole the spotlight with a story from election night that transpired moments after Dunn heard the news that Bush emerged the victor. At a Republican victory party at the Bellevue Hyatt, Dunn grabbed the remote control to flip it to Channel 48, Fox News.

“But at the Bellevue Hyatt,” bellowed Carlson, “Channel 48 gives you the porn channel. Of course, the guests were somewhat surprised!”

In March, 2005 Dunn began work with the law firm DLA Piper as a senior advisor on government affairs. “It’s the second largest law firm in the world,” Dunn told Dave Ammons after she retired. The firm boasts a payroll filled with the biggest names in American politics like Democrat Dick Gephardt, a former House Majority Leader, Texas’ Dick Armey, a House Majority Leader credited with organizing the Republican Revolution in the 1990s and U.S. Senator George Mitchell, the Democrat who became Senate Majority Leader in 1989. The partisanship is gone, said Dunn of her relationship with her colleagues across the political aisle.

The Washington Post noted Dunn’s candor when asked if she would lobby for DLA Piper “Yes – starting in 10 months,” she told the paper flatly.

The humanitarian

A handmade sign haphazardly stuck between two tin shacks read: SILOAM FELLOWSHIP ACADEMY FOR ORPHAN & NEEDY CHILDREN. “Education is the Key to Peace and Victory,” it quietly declared. Retired Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn stood on the southwest side of Nairobi in an African shantytown filled with corrugated tin roofs, mud walls, and a plethora of sorrowful stories. Kibera held the dubious honor as the largest slum in Africa and the second largest in the world.



With George H.W. Bush and Barbara at Kennebunkport, a summer home of the Bush family. *Keith Thomson photo.*

“You can just see miles and miles and miles of tin shacks. And this is where people live,” recalls Mary Bush who chaired a special commission that traveled to Africa with Dunn in 2007.

One journalist for the BBC describes Kibera as: “Six-hundred acres of mud and filth, with a brown stream dribbling through the middle. You won’t find it on your tourist map – or any other map. It’s a squatters camp – an illegal, forgotten city – and at least one third of Nairobi lives here.”

A baffling one-million people squeezed into a community the size of New York City’s Central Park. Malaria and Aids were rampant. In 1998, in one section of the slum, there were reportedly all of 10 working pit latrines to serve some 40,000 people. Yet, hope abounds.

Driven by a calling to “restore the broken-hearted” Siloam Fellowship Academy opened its doors in 1992 to African orphans, widows, and the needy. Proper care and education changed lives. In 2009, the future held promise. Two of its 650 students had finished college and 87 more were close behind. The academy offered ten different classrooms, two water tanks, and electricity.

“Yes, I recall her (Jennifer Dunn) and honor her visit in Siloam Fellowship Ministry Academy,” says its founder, Bishop Stephen Wanyonyi. “Our prayers goes (sic) to our late sister to rest in peace.”



Jennifer Dunn the humanitarian visits one of the poorest slums in the world. Thomas Briggs and Wesley Wilson photo.



As a member of the HELP Commission, Dunn evaluated U.S. aid and made recommendations to Congress. Thomas Briggs and Wesley Wilson photo.

To evaluate U.S. aid and propose improvements to Congress, Dunn took on the poignant and inspiring assignment for the Congressional commission, “Helping to Enhance the Lives of People around the Globe” in March, 2007. Dunn and a team of delegates traveled to Kenya, entered Wanyonyi’s academy, and saw firsthand what it meant to attend school in a kind of jolting poverty

most Americans will never see.

“It was inside one of these tin shacks with mud floors with very little light and it was extremely hot,” recalls HELP Commission Chair Bush. “But when we got off the plane, we were greeted with song, festivities, and people in their native dress. You know, no matter how difficult things are, people do try to put their best foot forward.”

The bright colored dresses, scarves, head pieces, and shiny gold jewelry stood in great contrast to the dirt, mud floors, and drab buildings that surrounded them.



Dunn takes in African culture on an assignment for the HELP Commission.
Thomas Briggs and Wesley Wilson photo.



“They were drawn to her,” commission members say of Dunn’s appeal to children.
Thomas Briggs and Wesley Wilson photo.

At one school, children clad in crisp, gray-white-and-red uniforms gathered gleefully around the Congresswoman for glimpses in her digital camera. “They were drawn to her,” commission members agree. At another, students wrote and sang a special song for their American visitors.

“The head mistress of the school and the girls had put together a program,” recalls Bush of one of the more

memorable moments of the trip. “The girls sang a song that they had written themselves. The gist of that song, the main line, was ‘I just want a chance. Just give me a chance.’ It was so moving Jennifer and I both were sitting there in tears.”

When the program ended, the head mistress approached Bush. “We are just so grateful to the United States for giving us this money so that we could start this girls’ school because otherwise they simply would not be educated,” she told her.

Dunn’s husband, Keith Thomson, recalls a HELP Commission story from the Republic

“ We have a moral obligation to humanity to help people around the world. ”



"I watched her connect with the people. You know, this is a very senior, very prominent former Congresswoman who is out there and she's hugging - like it's her family." *Thomas Briggs and Wesley Wilson photo.*

of Ghana in West Africa. There, Dunn met a woman who thanked her profusely for U.S. aid. "The U.S. had been so helpful giving money here, but the budget is going to be cut. Please could you help us?" Thomson says when the woman walked away, Dunn simply broke down in tears.

"I watched her connect with the people," agrees Bush. "You know this is a very senior, very prominent former Congresswoman who's out there and she's hugging - like it's her family. She just fell in love with the children. She just had

a way about her. You can feel when something is genuine and when it's just there for the camera and the press. And with her I'll tell you, it was genuine."

In her role on the HELP Commission made up of renowned appointees from various backgrounds, Bush credited Dunn with uniting political parties, strong personalities, and highly accomplished people. "She brought, I think, a hand of grace and a hand of wisdom. She was one of the most valuable members. She was a person who used both sides of her brain very well, the emotional and the intellectual. I just thought Jennifer was a wonderful person."

All told, the experiences left the HELP Commission united in a belief that money alone would not ease the suffering in poverty-stricken communities. "The world has changed and U.S. assistance programs have not kept pace," the Commission reported to the President and Congress. Among its recommendations, members encouraged a wholesale rewrite of the Foreign Assistance Act, a greater emphasis on job creation in the developing world, and business models that engage non-governmental partners.



Hope and a new beginning. Jennifer Dunn stands behind Mary Kay Bush, chair of the HELP Commission. *Thomas Briggs and Wesley Wilson photo.*

“Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn, who wanted America to be known not just for its strength but for its compassion, was an invaluable member,” Chairman Bush said in dedicating the Commission’s final report to Jennifer Dunn and paying tribute to the fallen U.S. Representative.

“I think Jennifer would say no matter how hard the times are that the United States is going through we have a moral obligation to humanity to help people around the world who have very, very difficult lives.”

At the Washington D.C. think tank Brookings where the Commission’s findings were unveiled after Dunn died, Bush told the audience, “She genuinely cared about the people in the developing world who are striving to lead lives that are much more like the lives that we lead in this room and that we in America lead.

“I want to thank her husband Keith Thomson,” Bush continued. “Keith is here with us today. Keith, would you stand for a moment? In the back, ladies and gentlemen on the left, is Keith Thomson. Keith is honoring Jennifer’s extraordinary life by establishing a foundation. That foundation is called the Jennifer Dunn Thomson Foundation for America’s Future. The funds in that foundation will be directed to young people especially girls to help them enter public service. We thank you, Keith, for honoring our friend and your beloved in this way.”

The happiest summer

The month before she died, Dunn turned 66. It was the happiest summer of her life. Thomson, Dunn, and their children traveled to the Tulchan Lodge, a 1906 estate in Europe. The picturesque lodge and its property stretch



Jenny and Keith in traditional Scottish attire at the Tulchan Lodge.
Keith Thomson photo.

over 25,000 acres.

“This was the summer of 2007 and we had gone over for Angus’ graduation from Oxford,” says Thomson. “We went there for that and the next day was Jennifer’s birthday. I gave her a lunch for her birthday with all of my English relatives at this lovely restaurant in Oxford. She could see her two boys and their wives being part of my extended family and it was just – she seemed very comforted by that. She loved the sense of family.”



Jennifer Dunn-Thomson proudly attends her step-son Angus’ doctoral graduation from Oxford. *Keith Thomson photo.*



The Dunn-Thomson legacy. *Keith Thomson photo.*

They visited Thomson's grandfather's small stone house in Scotland. "We went fishing up there for a week – all of us in kilts," recalls Thomson. The entourage included Thomson's two brothers and their wives, as well as the children of Thomson and Dunn and their spouses. "It was a dirty dozen up there," he continues. "It was just absolutely exquisite. It's right there on the River Spey and it's just great fishing there. Bryant, who is a world class fisherman, loved it. Jennifer said it was the happiest summer of her life."

An unexpected death

The happiest summer came to an abrupt and devastating end over Labor Day weekend in 2007. The retired Congresswoman did not suffer from a heart-wrenching, withering disease. In the months leading up to her death, Dunn was very much alive, engaged, and planning for the future. In fact, there were no significant medical problems whatsoever to signal such tragedy. The morning her family announced her death, Dunn had a conference call scheduled with the HELP Commission.

It had been a beautiful Labor Day weekend. Keith and Jennifer Dunn-Thomson took in the annual International Antiques Show in Baltimore. They savored soft-shelled crab at their favorite crab shack on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. "It's more of a shack than it is a restaurant," says Thomson. "We just had a delight sitting out in the sun and eating crab." The weather couldn't have been lovelier. There were no signs of any health issues.

"Absolutely not," says Thomson. "And I mean that."

On Labor Day morning, Thomson woke early to brew coffee and make a hot breakfast in their Alexandria, Virginia condominium overlooking the large, meandering Potomac River.

"It was a beautiful absolutely crisp September morning," recalls Thomson. "I heard her say, 'Oh! What a gorgeous morning.' There was enthusiasm and a sense of wonder and delight there."

"I heard her say... 'Keith, I am so happy.' And so I put the cup of coffee down."

Dunn emerged wearing a peach robe and steadied herself on the door jam. She stretched one arm out toward Keith. “She was standing there tall and elegant, no evidence of pain, no crying out. She looked at me, looking dreamily beautiful, and then sank to her knees, and rolled over onto her side.

“She didn’t say a word. Nothing. By the time I got to her she was not breathing,” says Thomson. “There was no pulse. I did CPR. I called 911 and got her up breathing again. I got her to the hospital at the ICU. They were helping her breathe. She appeared to be sleeping. The doctor said, ‘She doesn’t know yet that this has happened.’”

“She had not regained consciousness by the time they got her to the hospital,” explains LaBrache. “It was an embolism; it was a blood clot in the lung. And so the doctors said, ‘We’re watching her.’ And they had her on breathing apparatus and those kinds of things. And that was Monday and she seemed to be stabilizing. And Keith called me Tuesday morning.”

Thomson spent 24 hours in the Intensive Care Unit at his wife’s side, holding her hand. But Dunn never regained consciousness.

Meanwhile, Lisa LaBrache returned from a vacation in Washington State to find a recent email from Dunn. The former congresswoman may have retired, but she remained a force in American politics as Co-Chair of “Women for Mitt,” a campaign to help the onetime Governor of Massachusetts reach the White House.

In her email, Dunn asked LaBrache for a dinner date to go through boxes and talk about the next steps for the Romney campaign.

“She said, ‘Hey, we need to get together,’ recalls LaBrache. “We’ve got to get going on this Romney stuff and I want to go through some boxes. So, let’s plan on getting together Wednesday, and having dinner and going through stuff. And we can start working on the campaign.’

“And in the meantime, of course, I’d left a message for her saying, ‘Hey. It’s Tuesday. I got your message. I’m back in town. I’ll make sure we do it Wednesday.’ And he (Keith) said, ‘She’s in the hospital. Here’s the situation. Can you come on over?’ And I said, ‘Sure, I’m right there. Not a problem.’ And it went downhill from there.”

By September 4, the family knew Dunn would not recover and honored her decision to have her organs donated.

“We were all able to say goodbye and do all those plotting and planning things that you do when you have no idea what you’re doing,” says LaBrache. “But the hospital was wonderful, they were great, and understood completely that they had a former Member of Congress, and treated everybody with great respect.”

On September 5, the Dunn-Thomson family announced her death: “Jennifer Dunn led an amazing if all too short life. In the words of President Bush used on her retirement from Congress, “She is a superb legislator and a strong leader who has stood for the best of Washington State’s values and who has improved the lives of its people.

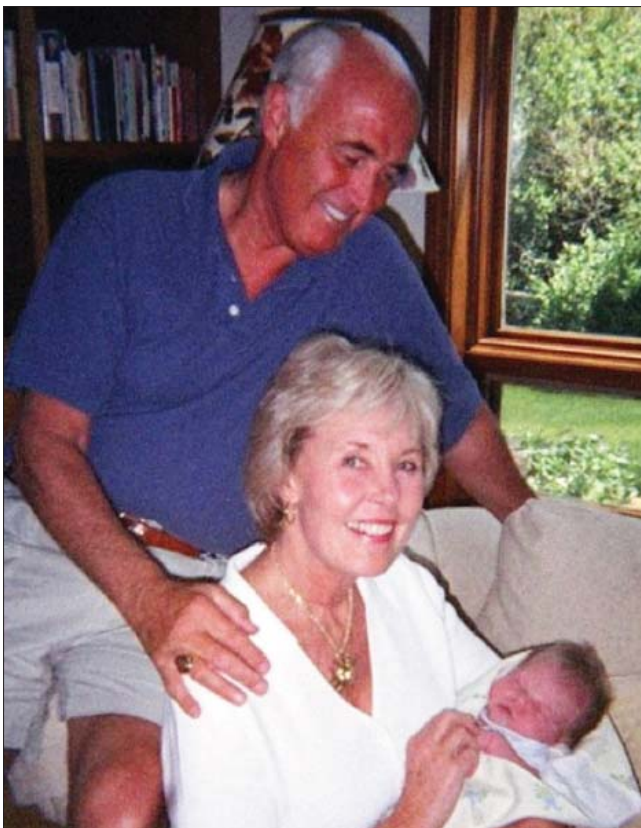
"Her political career was a series of firsts: first woman to chair the Washington State Republican Party (1981), first freshman woman to win a place in the House Republican leadership team (1992) and went on to be elected as the highest ranking Republican women in leadership as the Vice Chairman of the Conference... what Jennifer Dunn was most proud of was her family. She delighted in talking of the successes of her sons, Bryant Dunn, Reagan Dunn and Angus Thomson... She passed peacefully surrounded by family."

News of her passing stunned and saddened constituents and dignitaries across the world. Doug Ellis recalls the painful moment when he heard the news. "Oh my god, I was here at the commission. I got a call from her longtime secretary Lois Smith. And yeah, it was real sad. It was interesting because all of her trips back and forth flying, you know, there was always a concern about clotting, blood clots. I think that's what did her in."

"And the real sad thing about it is that she was *finally* settling down, and *finally* having some quiet time in her life,"



Little Dix Bay, Virgin Gorda, Virgin Islands. Keith Thomson photo.



Thomson believes Dunn relished their private moments and time with family most of all. Keith Thomson photo.

adds Ellis. "As you're younger you push, and you strive, and you do things, and you're always active, and moving. And then as you get older there should be quiet time. There should be a time to say, "Okay, now I've done all this. Let's rest for a little bit, let's play with my grandchildren, let's do things with my husband, let's take it a little slower than we have in the past." And she didn't have that much time to do that."

For family and close friends, the death of Jennifer Dunn remained surreal and impossible to fathom.

"I had two amazing, amazing moments in the dark of all of this," offers LaBrache. "We put out the press release and basically the phone was ringing off the hook. We were calling everybody letting them know what was going on. Keith, her husband,

was just worn-out. It was like two or three in the afternoon and he said, 'I'm going to go lay down and take a nap.' We said, 'Fine.' His son Angus and I were in the house and said, '... not to worry, we'll cover everything. You go lay down.'"

Mentally and physically exhausted, Thomson crawled into bed.

"About five minutes after he'd gone in the bedroom, the phone rang," says LaBrache. "We had turned off the phone in the bedroom so he wouldn't be disturbed. I answered the phone. I said, 'Dunn-Thomson residence, may I help you?' And the caller said, 'Yes, I need to talk to Keith.' And I said, 'Okay, sir. May I tell him who's calling?' He said, 'This is 41. President Bush, Number 41.' And I said, 'Yes sir, Mr. President. One moment please.' And I'm thinking, 'Holy god, here's the President of the United States.' So, I knocked on the door. I said, 'Keith. It's President Bush. It's 41.'"

"This is George Bush," Thomson recalls the President saying. "'I have to tell you, Keith that you and Jennifer really embarrassed Barbara and me.' I didn't know how to answer that. It was a condolence call. So I said, 'Mr. President, I'm very sorry. When was that?' He said, 'Do you remember when you and Jennifer came and stayed with us?' I said, 'Yes.' He said 'We had other people staying in the house. You two – all you would do was walk around holding hands, looking at each other.'"

"An hour later, the phone rings again," LaBrache remembers. "I answered the phone, 'Dunn-Thomson residence.' 'Uh, yeah, I'm looking to speak to Keith Thomson.' And I said, 'Yes, sir. May I tell him who is calling?' He said, 'It's 43.' Which is *the* president, George W. I said, 'Yes, sir Mr. President.' And he was in Australia. I mean, this is the power of this woman. And after that, it was Condoleezza Rice. Margaret Thatcher sent a note."

"It might even have surprised Jennifer Dunn if she'd heard what I did the other day when a restaurant patron seated near me commented to her companion, 'Jennifer Dunn died and some opera singer.' Some opera singer was Luciano Pavarotti, such a superb singer they've already started arguing over who succeeds him in estimation as the finest living tenor in the world," wrote longtime newspaper columnist Adele Ferguson.

The same week, Congressman Paul Gilmore of Ohio died and ironically, Karen Marchioro who found her place in Washington politics with Dunn as Chair of the Washington



David Horsey, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* photo.

State Democratic Party while Dunn served in the same capacity for Republicans.

In tribute to the late Dunn, David Horsey created a cartoon with the elegant Congresswoman standing tall on a pillar while a mudslinging elephant and donkey duke it out below on behalf of the Republican and political parties respectively.

Remembering Jennifer

Inside the breathtaking and massive St. James Cathedral in Seattle, mourners gathered to pay last respects to Jennifer Dunn-Thomson. A who's who of Washington politics, including constituents, friends, and family filled the church.

"I bless the body of Jennifer Dunn with the holy water... May she be clothed in glory," said Reverend Michael G. Ryan to a somber yet celebratory crowd. "Jennifer was filled with life by a God who was very good in giving her to us."



Celebrating a life worth remembering. St. James Cathedral, Seattle.
Keith Thomson photo.



Keith Thomson photo.

"A Christian that she was," he continued of Dunn's Episcopalian beliefs. "Jennifer did look at things with the eyes of faith. There is an appointed time for everything from the Heavens... But we never fully understand. We know that there is a time to be born, and a time to die. But our knowledge stops there... The timing is always God's never ours."

Dunn was a first-rate communicator said Congresswoman Doc Hastings, and showed him the ropes when he was first elected to represent the 4th District of Washington. Republicans would strive to sit near her at political events, he said, because the television cameras always found her, a striking woman wearing yellow in a sea of dark suits.

He and Jennifer were renegades when they first met 32 years ago. They respected the principles of Ronald Reagan in 1975, six years before he occupied the White House.



"Her love was pure, it was perfect, and it was permanent," Bryant Dunn said of his mother at a memorial and celebration of her life.
Keith Thomson photo.

"She was always proud of her sons; they brought immense joy to her life," said Hastings. "In remembering Jennifer Dunn, let us rejoice in a life lived fully and confidently. She was a remarkable woman. Washington State and the nation have lost a giant of a leader."

"What most impressed me about Jennifer," offered William Ruckelshaus in an eloquent and booming voice, "was her love of her

two sons, Reagan and Bryant, and of course their wives and two grandchildren, and her pride in their accomplishments. And more recently, the obvious lift to her happiness and satisfaction in her life from her marriage to Keith."

"Jennifer was a consummate public servant who was not afraid to listen hard to someone with whom she disagreed."

Ruckelshaus told the cathedral of his many trips to Washington D.C. with Dunn where he, as Director of the Environmental Protection Agency, would plead with Appropriations Committee Chair Frank Wolf to cut federal dollars loose and rescue salmon.

"In fact, I don't think Frank knew a salmon from a carp," Ruckelshaus razzed as the audience roared. Wolf's eyes would glaze over, he said, and at the end of their discussions, Wolfe would look at Jennifer and ask, "Is this important to you, Jennifer?" Each time, said Ruckelshaus, she would offer the same response: "'Very.' And he would say, 'Then we must fund it.' And that's how the salmon along the Northwest Coast of North America got help from the federal government."

“ Mom, you will not be forgotten...
I will think of you during every peach sunset. ”

"There can be no doubt why Jennifer rose higher in the Congress than any woman before her. It was because of the respect and esteem of her colleagues like Frank Wolf."

"She was above all things a wonderful lady who was full of love," said her oldest son Bryant. "My mother lives on."

Reagan Dunn called her his best friend and mentor. "She spent her whole life giving to other people... Mom worked really hard to make everything look easy... She understood that one of the characteristics of a great leader was to develop those young people who would lead us in the future."

As he looked around the room, Reagan noted row after row of Dunn protégés. “Mom would not have wanted any of you to leave... sad. She would have wanted you to, as she would say, get over it... She would have wanted to move on... to leave the world a better place than we found it... Mom, you will not be forgotten... I will think of you during every peach sunset. I will pass on the values you taught me to my family. I will never forget you. And Mom, as we honor you here today, I want you to know, that through all of the Ages, no son could have ever been more proud.”

Dunn’s widower, Keith Thomson somberly accepted an American flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol the day she died. Dunn’s son Bryant and



The American flag flies at half-staff in tribute to Jennifer Dunn. The U.S. Capitol.



Keith Thomson is presented with an American flag to honor his late wife. *Keith Thomson photo.*

her grandchild Amanda stood near.

After the gathering, one of Dunn’s political heroes, Newt Gingrich, paid his respects and offered condolences to her family.

“He came to Reagan’s house after the service,” recalls an appreciative LaBrache. “Those were moments when I’m thinking, ‘You’re still here and working.’”

The legacy of Jennifer Dunn

“Do you really want to get into this life?” Dunn had asked her son Reagan as he considered a run for the King County Council. “Don’t you want to make a bunch of money in the private sector?”

“And I said, ‘No, I don’t think my heart is there,’ Reagan recalls. “I think my heart is in public service. You know, I always wanted to be a litigator. I always wanted to be in court... I did the whole college law school thing at the UW. And what happened was I got that chance early on. I was in a big firm, and got to do a lot of court time... And I said, ‘Okay, wait a minute. I guess I’ve reached my goal. What am I going to do now?’ So, Rob

McKenna was in my seat, ran and won Attorney General and this opening happened. As anyone who runs for office will tell you... there is a time to run. When Mom died, and I had been on the council for three years it strengthened that, it sort of lit the torch even *more*."

Though initially concerned about his two sons after the passing of Dunn, their father, Dennis Dunn, is confident they will survive and flourish.

"I think he's extremely gifted politically," says Dennis Dunn of son Reagan, for example. "He learned a lot from his mother. He has a lot of charisma and tremendous political smarts. He needs to find, I think, and really get in touch with personal core beliefs philosophically. He's a quick study and very bright. I think he also is leery of taking any positions in which is political enemies could cast him as a hard-core ideologue. Jennifer was much the same way. Although there were times when she and Reagan both are willing to cast a hard vote in support of their principles and that's what America needs and wants."

In fact, dozens of up-and-coming Republicans have made their careers with the guidance of Dunn, says Reagan who in 2009 served his second term as a King County Councilmember. "And she trained them well. One sign of a leader is that you take and train young people to move forward, and she was *very* good at that.



"I think my heart is in public service," said Reagan when Dunn questioned his future.

Dunn family photo.

“When Mom died... it lit the torch even more.”

"She grew up in an era that was sort of the Leave It to Beaver, stay-at-home-mom era. Men dominated the workforce. And she bucked the trend by going to Stanford, and then getting a series of jobs that showed responsibility, and then outfoxing some men and rising through a number of glass ceilings... She was a trendsetter for women, in politics in particular. It shows you can do it. You can be in Congress. It can all work out.

"I think she did just downright great constituent work and took care of a lot of people. She helped get a president elected in no small way. That was important."

"Oh, people matter, absolutely," Thomson remarks on her legacy and her values. "Truth. She was very, very clear about always telling the truth, even if you are doing something that you shouldn't have been doing. That whole question of absolute integrity was there. But it was also very similar to the Ronald Reagan set of values of a smaller government,



From day one Dunn encouraged Republicans to open the party tent.
Seattle Post-Intelligencer photo.

reliance on the individual and strong support of family. In public service, one has to give back.”

“I think she matters because she perhaps more than any other single individual in my generation in any generation after me, opened up the Republican Party and the conservative attitude to be more welcoming to a larger group and a broader range of people,” admires longtime U.S.

Senator and close friend Slade Gorton.

LaBrache, who in 2009 continued work for the Dunn Family as an advisor to Reagan in the King County Council’s Office, feels the loss each day. “Every day. Most of the time when we’re out on the campaign trail... something comes up – and it’s basically, ‘Tell me what to do. How do I do this? What do I say? How do I guide him?’ You know, it’s the little things... Things pop in your head. You’re thinking, ‘Okay, that’s a good idea.’ It’s the understanding of what you’ve been taught for 20 years. And Reagan doesn’t need a whole lot of guidance. He’s very sharp because he was with his mom all his life.

“It’s been magic for me. I’ve often said to my friends, ‘I wouldn’t have changed *anything* except for the end.’”

Widower Keith Thomson launched the Jennifer Dunn Thomson Foundation for American’s Future to provide scholarships to young political leaders.

“The foundation will continue Jennifer’s support of young people by providing scholarships at both the state (particularly Washington State) and federal levels to assist young people, particularly women, wishing to enter service. Her beautiful legacy will live on,” states Thomson in tribute.

Out of Ellensburg, the Jennifer Dunn Leadership Institute formed to recruit future Republicans to carry the torch. “America is waking up. The question is: when morning comes again, will conservatives be ready to lead?” poses the institute on its website. “Jennifer Dunn personifies the kind of leaders the Institute seeks to develop: bright, energetic, politically savvy, and values-driven.”



Keith Thomson and Bryant Dunn share a love of the outdoors.
Keith Thomson photo.

Dunn's oldest son Bryant, a great outdoorsman, owns Smokey Mountain Outfitters in Idaho. In an interview years before her death, Dunn beamed when asked about Bryant. "He carved out a life for himself," she told C-SPAN proudly glancing back at a picture of her boys. Bryant married Jessica Wolcutt and is a father to Amanda and Madeline.

Reagan married Paige Green who recently gave birth to their first son, Hayden.

"I want my son to know that his grandmother was a very special person," says Reagan. "She got through a lot of glass ceilings... someone who helped put Washington on the map, someone who cared a lot about their community. And it wasn't about her and what she did, I don't want to cram it down their noses, but I want them to know when they're growing up that they had a grandmother who was a very, very, special, unique, and wonderful human being."

Life, indeed, had resumed. Thomson lives in California for the foreseeable future, grappling admirably with his own battle against bone cancer. His spirits are up and he is reaching out to Dunn's family to write a book about the extraordinary life of his late spouse.

"We talk all the time," he says soberly. "I was talking to her about Reagan and Bryant and how they are coming along. I don't know whether she has joined the Congress up there or if she is in some leadership position."

Reflecting, Thomson describes his love with Dunn as "stars all the time. We did not have a cross word. Both of us felt so fortunate and it was absolutely wonderful. Clearly, other people saw that too."

Thomson believes Dunn relished their private moments and her time with family most of all. He has remained connected to friends, to loved ones, and to their children. "I've seen her sons continue to mature. My son Angus, for example, just adored her and she was always interested in what he was doing and always knew what he was doing. Also to the point, my grandchildren – the daughter of my stepdaughter – they came to the wedding – still talks about Jennifer in such wonderful terms."

There is no bitterness in Thomson's voice. On the contrary, he is grateful for the life they shared together.



Keith returns to Tulchan Lodge a year after Dunn's death.
Keith Thomson photo.



"To the people I care about who care about me, I will not let you down." Congresswoman Jennifer Dunn.
Keith Thomson photo.

"Clearly, I was madly and wonderfully in love with her and that inspires me to a certain extent."

By the end of Dunn's life, she remained a loyal American whose legacy is engrained in Washington politics and acknowledged around the globe. It lives in women of every shape and size, from a cast of protégés practicing a softer side of conservatism, to the women in the developing world, fighting for their rights and freedoms.

"It was an incredible moment in history," observes Charlotte Ponticelli who worked so closely with Dunn while a "New Iraq" struggled to emerge.

"You hear all the negatives about Iraq. But think of all of the brave women that that we had the honor and the privilege to work with and hopefully help in some way. It makes you feel proud. She's inspired not just Iraqi women, but those of us fighting the battle of bureaucracy.

She was one of the most special people I ever met. She was beautiful inside and out. She just had a presence when she walked in the room."

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