



## Gabby: A Story of Courage and Hope

*Gabrielle Giffords, Mark Edward Kelly*

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From one of the most admired and beloved couples in recent American history, an extraordinarily moving story of public service, risk-taking, romance—and the journey toward recovery. This book delivers hope and redemption in the face of the tragic shooting, and introduces two unforgettable heroes.

**AS INDIVIDUALS, CONGRESSWOMAN GABRIELLE GIFFORDS** and her husband, astronaut Mark Kelly, showed Americans how optimism, an adventurous spirit, and a call to service can help change the world. As a couple, they became a national example of the healing power to be found in deeply shared love and courage. Their arrival in the world spotlight came under the worst of circumstances. On January 8, 2011, while meeting with her constituents in Tucson, Arizona, Gabby was the victim of an assassination attempt that left six people dead and thirteen wounded. Gabby was shot in the head; doctors called her survival “miraculous.”

As the nation grieved and sought to understand the attack, Gabby remained in private, focused on her against-all-odds recovery. Mark spent every possible moment by her side, as he also prepared for his final mission as commander of space shuttle *Endeavour*.

Now, as Gabby’s health continues to improve, the couple is sharing their remarkable untold story. Intimate, inspiring, and unforgettably moving, *Gabby: A Story of Courage and Hope* provides an unflinching look at the overwhelming challenges of brain injury, the painstaking process of learning to communicate again, and the responsibilities that fall to a loving spouse who wants the best possible treatment for his wife. Told in Mark’s voice and from Gabby’s heart, the book also chronicles the lives that brought these two extraordinary people together—their humor, their ambitions, their sense of duty, their long-distance marriage, and their desire for family.

Gabby and Mark made a pledge to tell their account as honestly as possible, and they have done so in riveting detail. Both Gabby and Mark have lived large public lives, but this book takes readers behind many closed doors—from the flight deck of the space shuttle to the cloakrooms of Congress to the hospital wards where Gabby struggled to reclaim herself with the help of formidable medical teams and devoted family and friends.

Questions are answered with unvarnished candor. How do Gabby and Mark feel about the angry political discourse that was swirling in America at the time of the shooting, and that remains prevalent today? How do they see government living up to the highest possible ideals? And how do they understand and mourn the loss of the people who did not survive that day? *Gabby: A Story of Courage and Hope* is a reminder of the power of true grit, the patience needed to overcome unimaginable obstacles, and the transcendence of love. In the story of Gabrielle Giffords and Mark Kelly, we all can see the best in ourselves. As Mark and Gabby’s friends have said: “The two of them are America as we dream it can be.”

## **Gabby: A Story of Courage and Hope Details**

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## From Reader Review Gabby: A Story of Courage and Hope for online ebook

### PoligirlReads says

It's unfortunate that I never gave much attention to either of these individuals before tragedy hit. Like most, I've been following Gabby's improvement in the news, most recently with the 20/20 interview. The book reveals that the backstory given in the interview was only a small sampling of what their life has been like this year.

Quick verdict: I highly recommend this book. Her amazing struggle to recover from being shot in the head (THE HEAD!) is book-worthy, but I also find the level of commitment Mark has to his wife to be almost more compelling. Many of us say the pledge about sticking around through sickness and health, but this book represents a clear, oftentimes stark (and oftentimes funny) illustration of what that really entails.

The details: I don't know whose decision it was, but the choice to bounce back and forth between Gabby's recovery and their childhood, entry into public service, marriage, etc. was a good one. It helps sustain interest while we get the opportunity to learn more about them than just the shooting and its aftermath. I think this also helps with the fact that...well...Mark isn't a great writer. I suspect that in between missions in the Gulf war and going into space there isn't much time to work on one's literary flourishes, so I don't hold that against him one bit. Plus, their lives have been so fascinating that my interest was easily sustained.

I also appreciate how the book addresses not only how life has been for Mark and Gabby, but how the shooting has affected their entire family, especially their (step)daughters. Throughout, he is very candid about all involved. At times I wondered if he was perhaps being too personal (especially about various bodily functions), but I do think this candor gives an unvarnished picture of how much life can change when a loved one sustains an injury.

It is clear that the politician in the family is not Mark. There are parts of the book where he is completely operating without a filter (or if he is filtering himself, I'd hate to see what an unedited version would look like!). This is particularly apparent in the chapter "Higher Calling." The point at which he describes the apparent devastation of the Palin family with the fact she never once bothered to call either of them, evoked an audible "Oh SNAP!" out of me. The man pulls no punches and drops more bi-partisan gossip than a D.C. barbershop. And I loved every minute of it.

The ending chapter (page, really) is written by Gabby, is sweet, and a reminder of the challenges she has overcome, and the ones she still faces.

Go ahead and buy this book, and while you're at it, a box of tissues. You'll need 'em.

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### Gina says

After Gabby Giffords was shot in an incident that left others killed and her gravely injured, I was curious about her. I had heard of her husband, Mark Kelly the astronaut, but was unfamiliar with Congresswoman Giffords. I picked this up on impulse from the library in order to learn more. This book is a celebration of her

life, including photos from infancy to present day. There are numerous details about her relationship with Mark from their meeting, to wedding, to his help with her recovery. The last third of the book focuses on her recovery from the gunshot wound to the head and Kelly's last space mission. This is a celebration of her life and their marriage, so deeper exploration into her politics and the man/events surrounding her injuries are absent. Most of the problems I had with this book are more personal and come from a cynical place. Is this couple really that perfect? Didn't Mark ever get angry or frustrated at the situation? Didn't Gabby ever fight with her stepdaughters? This is a good positive, uplifting story, but I wish it was a little better written (has a tendency to jump from one fact to another) to help me more personally connect with their story.

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### **Aaron says**

This was truly an amazing and inspiring story. Gabrielle Giffords was a Congresswoman from Arizona who was shot in the head while doing a public event in her district on January 8, 2011. Six people also at the event died, and 19 others were also seriously wounded. This is her story and that of her husband, astronaut Mark Kelly. It shares their lives before the event and what has happened since.

I have always been intrigued by Gabby Giffords. She had her traumatic brain injury just a week before Ray's stroke last year. In a way, I have always felt a bit of a parallel between my family and hers. While Ray's stroke did not leave him with as much of a recovery as hers, I could (and cannot) help but be inspired by the positive outlook and hard work/effort both Gabby and Mark have put forth since that difficult day.

Gabby is still on her road to recovery, but hearing how she and her husband continue to work so hard to overcome what happened is a great example of what love and persistence can accomplished.

One of the horrible irony's of what happened is that Giffords was a centrist Democrat who often looked across the aisle for compromised, but she was still targeted by someone, who was quite sick, because of political difference. In a way justice prevailed, because that man, who is never named in the book ultimately failed. While our political system continues to be divided by harsh rhetoric and an inability for the Republicans and Democrats to come together for the country, everyone is able to look to Gabby and find a shared respect for her and how she is a great symbol for our country.

I actually listened to this as an audiobook, and I think the fact that it is read by Mark Kelly to really make the result even more amazing. It was like hearing him tell me the real story of what they went through. Gabby reads the final chapter, which was written in her own words. I cannot imagine anyone not being moved by this book.

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### **Victoria\_Grossack Grossack says**

I have so many reactions to this book, many of which are based in personal experiences.

First, let me state that I vote in Tucson. Giffords is my representative. I rarely get involved in politics, as I'm so often out of the US, but I happened to be in Tucson for the 2010 election and did some GOTV work on her behalf.

The tension in Tucson before the election was extremely high, and I felt nervous around some of those

supporting the tea party candidate opposing her. They were loud and threatening. The local signs put up by the opposition were extremely vicious – as well as misleading. One sign, designed to terrify the seniors, advertised that she voted to cut the budget of Medicare. It's true, she did make that vote – but the tea party candidate (Jesse Kelly, who rather awkwardly has the same last name as Giffords' husband) wanted to abolish it altogether.

So the shooting was not a surprise, really. Yes, the shooter is mentally deranged (why on earth was he allowed to have a gun? would we allow a baby to drive?) but I sensed that we were on the brink of violence.

After the election I returned to Europe (where I live most of the time) for the winter holidays. Between Christmas and New Year I had a serious ski accident. Nothing heroic; I wasn't serving my country, but my injuries required surgery, 9 days in the hospital and months of pain and therapy and dependence on others. Giffords was shot the day after I came out of the hospital. As I lay in bed I watched the news on TV. I cried when I thought she had died; I barely dared to hope when the news took back the original report, and afterwards, while I was struggling to recover I watched every scrap of news. So I related to her story personally on several levels.

But now to the book itself. It is more Kelly's book than Giffords', because while she approved all of it, she was not capable of writing it herself. Nevertheless, it's still worth reading. It's important to understand what a caregiver goes through. I think some of the techniques he describes about decision making for a partner in this situation is important.

Some have complained that there isn't enough about Giffords' recovery, but I think Kelly and Zaslow cover it adequately. We have the milestones, and a sample of the frustrations. We learn about some of the icky details, such as bathroom accidents. I think there's enough to give a good picture of the progress of her recovery. Perhaps someday we will be able to see some of the stuff that Kelly filmed. However, as someone who has gone through a minor version of some of this, I can appreciate why Giffords is not yet ready to show this. I was greatly relieved when I no longer needed help for the toilet – and much later – could dispense with it when taking a shower.

There are some things I disagree with: At one point Kelly talks about how if you have excellent treatment, have caring friends, a positive attitude and do all that they tell you to do in rehabilitation/physical therapy, that you will recover. This isn't true. It may be true that these things are necessary for recovery, and there is no question that they help, but they aren't sufficient. Some injuries are too severe, and some bodies can't heal. There is a great portion of luck involved. At least Kelly/Zaslow show this when Giffords goes to group therapy with a number of other people who have suffered traumatic brain injury. The rest of them can barely speak. Of course, Giffords received superior care because of who she is – but these people should not be faulted for not having tried hard enough. Some injuries simply leave permanent damage.

I also don't care for Mark Kelly's attitude towards optics and some of the rules. He resented being chewed out for driving 75 mph near the space shuttle. I agree with the official at NASA; it was a stupid thing to do. I personally feel that some rules and laws are bad/wrong – even evil – and these should be broken, resisted or changed. However, many rules and laws are made to protect society, and should be obeyed, even if they are mildly inconvenient. I think following them shows some respect for society, and although Kelly doesn't feel this way, I have to assume that Giffords does – however, she's not in a position to articulate everything yet.

The book also covers Kelly's background and career, which as he was an astronaut, is inherently interesting. However, it's necessary because there is only so much to write about with respect to Gabby Giffords. There's also some repetition which pads it a little more. The language a little too plain and sometimes too

upbeat (I feel as if I'm reading something written for Reader's Digest). Yet the style has to be plain, because this is someone else speaking on Gabby's behalf, and it would be wrong to create a voice for her which isn't hers. And of course she is a politician, so a lot is framed very, very carefully. Nevertheless Kelly/Zaslow/Giffords cover all the important points: her background, her history, her positions on the issues (politics) and the hope that she will make a complete recovery. It also addresses more sensitive issues: her awkward relationship with her stepdaughters (and although that chapter was very carefully written, it could cause embarrassment and strain over the next few years) and more importantly, the political climate in Tucson prior to the shooting.

And here I want to mention something not in the book: the Stanley Milgram experiments. They showed – much to the horror of the world – how easy it is to get most people to do harm to others. And so Palin and the others who have been encouraging violence have been acting incredibly irresponsibly, because many people are extremely easy to manipulate.

But back to Gabby Giffords. She has come an incredible distance since the shooting, and from other reports, is still making progress. I hope and hope again that she will be able to return to work this year.

As for myself, chances are that I, like her, will never play the piano again – which is a little more unfortunate, as, unlike her, I actually did play the piano. However, the severity of her injuries make me realize how lucky I was.

PS If you have read the book, you may remember a passage in which Giffords kept repeating "block of time" - and where Kelly finally realized that she wanted him to take blocks of time for himself, such as going to the gym. He was very touched by her consideration. However, I think he misunderstood. She needed the blocks of time for herself. As someone who has been an invalid, I know how important it is to be alone occasionally (after reaching a certain level of functionality). However, when you're injured, you can't leave on your own - you have to get other people to go away, which can seem pretty ungrateful. So I expect Gabby didn't correct Mark when he assumed she was talking about him.

Of course, I could be wrong...

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## Nancy says

I finally understand why I took so long to finish this book – HOPE. Something that is in short supply of during these times and I found that Gabrielle Gifford's most challenging moment offers hope to the rest of us. The gunshot wound that she received to her head would have killed most people, but she fought, her husband fought, her parents fought and every one of her loved ones fought. This is a person that is loved and because of that love, we saw a miracle happen.

On January 8, 2011, while in Tucson at a Congress on Your Corner event Gabrielle Gifford's was shot at point blank range. The book does not give much time, less than a paragraph more along the lines of three sentences, to the person who pulled the trigger. The effort of this book does not dwell on the evil, it concentrates on the positive. That with determination and patience – and top-notch medical care – a devastating brain injury did not end the life of a promising and beloved woman.

We may not all know the story of her husband, the astronaut Mark Kelly and Gabby, but through this book we get to see the man and woman that they are. His humor, his fight, his frustration – but most of all, we see

the love he has for his wife. More importantly, through these pages, we see a determined woman, a young girl wanting to right wrongs and a politician that does not take the powers given to her for granted.

I know that the main point of this book was to introduce me to Gabrielle Gifford's, but I think my take away was more about neuroscience. Mark Kelly does a remarkable job in explaining some of the intricacies of the human brain and how they translate into future abilities and disabilities.

Now I do not know if it was right to laugh during the experiences that were related in this story, but there is humor. Laugh out loud funny accounts of how the brain can fixate on a word and how when you can't come up with the exact right term a substitute word can be funny , maybe not appropriate, but none the less funny.

Inspiring is a good word for this book. To see a good outcome from a horrible situation. I do not know if it would be realistic to think that Ms. Gifford's will return to politics, but every life-challenging situation needs an advocate. Spinal injury had Christopher Reeves and traumatic brain injury now has Gabrielle Gifford's. I just hope that she picks up this sword and fights for all – civilian and service personnel – that have had to battle the bureaucracy to get the care and treatment that they and their loved ones need and deserve.

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### **Naomi says**

What an incredibly, beautifully written book by a husband (although, I could def. see Zaslow's input) re: his wife's rise to public office and her incredible comeback from being shot in the head.

I must say that when it came across the news, that Gabby had been shot in the head, I broke down crying (I tend to remember the news had at first stated she died). I couldn't figure out the sense of the crime, particularly against this woman. I had seen her interviewed numerous times on Greta Van Sustern and other news programs and always enjoyed the interviews (although, she and I for a chunk of issues are polar opposites. She has always presented as an incredibly warm, down to Earth, yet strong woman. This book backs up my initial assessment of her and why I have always liked her.

(view spoiler)

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### **Ann Tracy says**

in the end i suppose i'm glad that i read this, but as a tucsonan it was a very difficult read (emotionally). i was thankful for the last chapter done in gabby's own voice, and that she still has hope.

the main criticism i've heard about this book was that it was too much about mark kelly but i'm unclear how it could be otherwise. it wasn't billed as a biography. true there is a lot in the book about NASA and kelly's last space shuttle, but it was interesting.

i really do hope that one day gabby will be able to return to public service and a full life.

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## **Christie Bane says**

This is a book that I scored this high not because of the writing (which was competent and engaging but not particularly moving) but because of the story.

I'm a Tucsonan and love Tucson, and even though Gabrielle Giffords was not MY Congresswoman (I'm in Grijalva's district), I have been a fan of hers almost as long as I've been in Tucson. I've followed her story in the Weekly and always admired her for being young, athletic, attractive, devoted to Tucson, and known for being a "nice" politician. I'm an even bigger fan of hers after this book.

I work with many people who have had head trauma and I can assure you that based on my experience, which has been with the people who have made the best recoveries, for the most part, her recovery is truly remarkable. I mean I would almost say it is miraculous. The fact that there's so much left of HER after that shooting is amazing. I really cannot wait to see what she does in the future and how her recovery will continue to progress.

It was interesting learning more about her husband, too. I never knew much about him from reading about her in the Weekly. It was kind of like he didn't exist because he didn't live here in town. I don't like him anywhere near as much as I like her, but I do appreciate his making their story so public and available.

I didn't notice until right now that I finished this book on the 2-year anniversary of the shooting. That wasn't planned at all; it was a total coincidence.

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## **Erin says**

I won this from a Goodreads First Reads giveaway. I have to say, I am so happy I did.

This was an emotional book.

I, like many others, hadn't heard of Gabrielle Giffords until January 8, 2011. Since the shooting that day in Arizona, I have been following her story very closely. That is why I was happy to receive this book.

The book is written by Gabby's husband, Mark Kelly, with help from Jeffrey Zaslow. He tells the story from his point of view, which is interesting and emotional at times. The book covers more than just the day of the shooting and Gabby's recovery afterward. Kelly recounts both his and her childhoods, her political career and even his career as a pilot for both the Navy and NASA. Gabrielle, while giving the okay to everything in the book, didn't contribute to the writing except for the end chapter. This is, obviously, because it was written during her recovery.

I liked hearing the story from Kelly. It gave it a very personal touch and really brought you into what happened.

Kelly has a very interesting writing style. He shifts, back and forth, between subjects. Most of the time this would make a story feel jumbled but in this case it gave it more character, makes it more interesting. My one problem with the book is that I wasn't a huge fan of everything he talked about in the book. I understand wanting to give details into their lives before the tragedy, but sometimes it felt like he was just

writing these things to fill the book.

I admire both Giffords and Kelly. They are two very caring people. The book shows this, as does the 7 page acknowledgments in the back. I admire both of them for everything they have accomplished in their lives and for how dedicated they both are to Giffords's recovery. You can tell how much they love each other while reading this book.

I teared up on several occasions while reading this. It is about, just what the title says, hope and courage. I look up to Giffords for not only the person she was before the shooting but the person she continues to be despite the shooting. She is an amazingly strong person.

I recommend reading it and learning a little more about the two great people. Their story really makes you appreciate what you have and makes you want to hold the people you love a little tighter.

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### **Shomeret says**

When I was reading about Gabby's rehab, I thought of people in my life who hadn't gotten an adequate rehab and had lost their mobility as a result. The issue goes well beyond the brain injured. Anyone who spends enough time confined to a hospital bed needs rehab afterward. I'm sure Gabrielle Gifford is determined to help other brain injured people who don't have her coverage, but what about the 99% who need rehab, and aren't brain injured?

I actually do have a friend with a brain injury which happened due to anoxia during a difficult childbirth. The hospital denied that she'd been brain injured and didn't give her rehab, so she had to recover slowly all on her own. Not only did she manage to do this, she also managed to raise her son. She's still not 100% nineteen years later. She's very dyslexic in written communication. Occasionally, she won't be able to remember a word or she'll stutter. But my friend is an amazing person. Who knows how much more she'd have been able to accomplish if she'd had good rehab.

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### **Shannon Renee says**

Like many, without the tragic shooting in Tucson I would have never heard of Gabrielle Giffords. There would be no reason to. I live in Kentucky, I'm a republican (don't frown like it's an evil thing!), and I do not follow Arizona, or the NASA program.

Tucson changed all of that.

I thought this book was an extremely up-close and honest take on that day, and the days that follow. I am a bit biased, as a Speech Therapist (Speech and Language Pathologist for the proper title :) I was concerned how the therapy would be portrayed. Often, we're seen as lesser people on the health care totem pole because our results are subtle. Sounds and language processing aren't measured like walking and OT (nothing but love for the other T's). There are few OMG days.

It was nice to see that they didn't belittle her progress.

I loved their warmth to this book. I loved the tone, the honesty, and the humor. I cannot recommend this enough.

I might not agree on the votes she cast, her stance on food, or her love of a state that is total opposite of mine. But I respect her, I root for her. I wish her well.

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### **Jean says**

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"I also think back to the time, after my second space flight, in 2006, when Gabby and I got to have lunch with the legendary British astrophysicist Stephen Hawking, who is paralyzed due to a form of Lou Gehrig's disease. It takes him an excruciatingly long time to say anything, and I pretty much gave up on conversing with him beyond a few pleasantries. But Gabby was just incredible. She intuitively knew what to do. After my failed attempt at interacting with Dr. Hawking, she kneeled down in front of his wheelchair and said, "Dr. Hawking, how are you today?" She then stared into his eyes and waited. As far as she was concerned there was no one else in the crowded room. She waited silently and patiently. Using a device that tracks the motion of a single facial muscle, he took at least ten minutes to compose and utter the phrase "I'm fine. How are you?" Gabby was in no rush. She could have kneeled there for an hour, waiting for his answer. I was so impressed.

After Gabby was injured, I found myself thinking about her encounter with Dr. Hawking. In fact, that memory helped me understand how I'd need to interact with her."

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### **Debbie says**

This book is very aptly titled. It truly is a story of courage and hope. I expected something a little more medically-oriented, which would have been fine, but this is a wonderfully-told, full, real-life story. The balance of long ago and more recent, tragedy and comedy, his career and hers, sorrow and joy is beautifully done. I'm a bit biased, having real-life connections to both Mark and Gabby, but I feel that I can honestly put that aside and say that this book is truly wonderful. It tells us about astronauts, politics, tragedy, family, life, fear, and love. It's honest and candid, and I thought it was inspirational on every level. Not too clinical, not too weepy, not too romantic, but rather a perfect blend of many things that come together in a seemingly effortless way. Despite the amount of work that clearly went into this book, it feels as though we're simply being told some fascinating stories as they surround the main saga. I felt uplifted at the end, clearly the intent.

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### **Cindy Knoke says**

I was surprised by this book. I expected the usual sugar-coated we went through hell, but all is rosy, sort of, book.

It was not such. It was a brave, honest, many times painful, but ultimately transcendent, factual recounting.

I was also surprised by the depth of layers in this book.

You get to learn details about NASA. Management seems as bad there as everywhere. You get to learn what you have to do to command, launch, dock in space and return the shuttle with a pluperfect score. You get to hear what it feels like looking down on earth, when your wife is having brain surgery because an untreated mentally ill person shot her in the head from three feet away.

You are informed that the Gifford/Kellys feel he should have had better access to mental health care.

You get to learn stuff you should have known but didn't, about traumatic brain injury. You are educated that as tragic as Gabby's situation is, many people are far more worse off because their insurance policies will not cover the rehab that she is still receiving.

Mainly you get to read a remarkable book about two remarkable people.

I am impressed, and far more deeply than I expected.

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### **Eric says**

My interest in this book was of course (1) the courageous and fascinating personal story of a remarkable couple and (2) I wanted to read what they had to say about Gabby's rehab course and see how they presented it. I've had the privilege and challenge of overseeing the medical and therapeutic care of many patients with injuries like those described in this book. The authors present a realistic picture and do a pretty good job at describing the roller-coaster that rehab often is. The way they describe their transformation from wanting quick full recovery to understanding that gains are made slowly over long periods with a lot of hard work was particularly insightful, I thought.

I was surprised but grateful that they didn't shy away from some of the more vulnerable moments. Such things are understandably the most difficult but also the most defining.

Gabby and Mark's journey is not unique, but I've rarely read a more honest portrayal. Their story and Gabby's determination remind me what a privilege working with such people is. Gabby's hard work and progress is remarkable and so are those who serve as her support team.

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