Mary Bono: Beyond Politics Finding Balance

Congresswoman Mary Bono and husband, Glenn Baxley

Congresswoman Mary Bono and her husband, Glenn Baxley, spoke candidly with Eisenhower Medical Center Foundation President Michael Landes about balancing home, health, family and career.

Michael: You both lead busy lives with frenetic schedules, but it wasn't always that way. Our Healthy Living readers would like to know a side of each of you beyond politics, at the heart of what you believe represents "healthy living," and where you developed your healthy habits. Glenn, people are not aware that you were a professional athlete.

Glenn: My senior year in high school, I was drafted by the Toronto Blue Jays. I turned it down because they only offered me pretty much a cup of coffee and a donut. I had a scholarship to the University of Arizona, which had just won the College National Championship, so I accepted their offer. In my sophomore year, I was playing with Trevor Hoffman (San Diego Padres) who is one of the most talented closing pitchers in the major leagues today. I wanted to play every day, but because of people like Trevor, I was platooning [substituting]. So, I told my coach, "I think I want a transfer." I went to Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho, and played 1989 and 1990 – when we won the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics World Series championship back to back.Then, I signed with the California Angels. I was drafted as a third baseman.

Michael: Fast-forward to today…you've got a lot of different responsibilities. You're in business. How do you stay in shape? [Baxley laughs] …The guilty laugh.

Glenn: I always loved to go into the backcountry when I was living in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. My fitness was hiking, and I would go for four to five days. My buddies and I would just hike up in the Tetons. I enjoyed hunting big game in Wyoming, and when you're walking through those mountains, it is a good hike. So, I've always had some type of fitness. It's just lately, and I don't know if I should share this with you [Baxley laughs]...when I got married to Mary. With two kids and Mary gone in Washington, I'd rather see my son's baseball games and play with my daughter, than workout now.

Michael: Mary, you live what must be a stressful life. The plane travel alone probably causes problems in your efforts to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Mary: It's a difficult struggle for a lot of reasons. The travel is the biggest problem for me, since I spend 20 hours a week just getting to and from Washington, D.C. Travel has interrupted my workout the most, since I used to be such a fanatic about it. In fact, I used to tell Newt Gingrich that the best thing you could do to clear your mind is to exercise since it rejuvenates everything you are doing. He didn't believe me at that time. It's interesting because now Newt has a new book, and he goes on and on about this very thing…how exercise is so important to clear your mind.

Glenn: When Mary and I finally get "down" time, we could make time to go to the gym. Instead, we relax or even hike with the kids, something to reduce the stress.

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Mary: It's part of our new society. It's always go! go! go! It's constant stimulants…the television is on, the radio is on, the Internet is on. Our generation could use some time to absolutely do nothing, or get up and walk or hike, and not be excessive. I can't believe that I am at this point in my life where I have to find the time to workout because it's always been natural for me.My schedule is tough – I never get on a biorhythm where you are unaware of the three-hour time difference. I flew in yesterday afternoon, and I fly out tomorrow morning again.When I'm in Washington, I'm working long hours, yet trying to find time to workout during the day. That time is gobbled up with meetings….

Michael: So, fitness has always been a top priority?

Mary: Yes, for me it began with the 1972 Olympics when I was 11. Olga Korbut was on the scene, and she became my idol. I started becoming a very competitive gymnast. Like Glenn, I spent much of my youth just devoted to a sport. Once I got to college, I quit. But the Nautilus® craze hit, and I became a little Nautilus queen.You know…with the little headband on. So, I've always felt a reason to workout. It's just now that I have lost it.

Michael: Maybe you need to spend more time with Governor Schwarzenegger?

Mary: Remember, he's always on one time zone and I think that helps. He starts every morning, I understand, on the bike, and takes phone calls while he's on the bicycle. I can't do that, and when I'm in Washington, my day starts with meetings. Maybe if I were to get up an extra hour…trust me, I need the sleep.

Michael: Hiking gives you a combination of not only staying fit, but also just relaxing and de-stressing.

Glenn: The great thing with Mary and I is that we truly appreciate the outdoors, and what's out there, and what God has given us. The time that Mary and I get to spend together in the environment works with us. Hiking, even with the kids, is really personal time for us. You're seeing beautiful things, especially where we live in the Valley. Hiking mentally washes all the grit out.

Mary: It's more than clearing my head. I really get a tremendous sense of purpose in life when we're hiking. I was lucky that I was brought up with parents who took us hiking and camping every summer when I was growing up. It's exhilarating! We love to get out there and take the dogs. Chianna is a great hiker. Chesare's not. He doesn't quite understand it. Chianna will get up and do four hours of it…and love every minute.

Michael: You live at the base of one of the most beautiful canyons.

Mary: Indian Canyon is a healing place to be and a beautiful place, but it's not unlike anywhere in the Valley. Murray Canyon, for example, is nearby and has beautiful waterfalls. We're still working on integrating trails for hikers and people who love riding horses in the mountains. It's important.We focus so much on golf here, but there's so much beyond that. The Valley needs to continue to expand recreationally. Glenn and I are working on ideas to bring more public space here for kids to enjoy and play baseball. Hopefully, we'll see some things developing to expand recreational opportunities for kids.

Michael: Glenn, who was an inspiration to you during your baseball years?

Glenn: Cal Ripken, Jr. He was just a class act throughout his whole career. Hard worker – never missed a game. He was wonderful in the community, and all-around, a super incredible person.

Michael: Life has changed for you. You're raising a family. You're married to a very busy person with a lot of responsibility.You have a lot of responsibility. You're in business. Do you have someone that you look up to?

Glenn: You know who I think does a wonderful job in balancing his work and his family is Greg Renker.We play golf with Greg and Stacey, and the way they balance their lives with their family – I like what they do.

Mary: Yes, Greg drives us crazy, too. Up at the Yellowstone Club, in Montana, it would be 10 degrees outdoors, and we would all be shivering. There's Greg running up the hill in his workout clothes…he may still be running up that hill.

Michael: Mary, how do you two keep it all in perspective?

Mary: My biggest perspective issues aren't in my marriage, as much as in my life. The stress can get to me.Ten days ago,we were told to run from the Capitol….When you're told to run, and then you're told to run faster, there's a certain amount of added stress in your life. The only thing I can imagine like it, would be on a military installation where you have six minutes, basically, to clear 10,000 people out of a building. It's an added stress, and I think it compounds… unless we have time to decompress and get home, and touch bases with our districts again, and our families again. Without question, I keep perspective by talking to my husband,my children,my parents and some good friends. It's always my friends and my family who breathe the life into me again.That keeps me going…and the occasional pat on the back.

Michael: Healthy living is about how to live the good life and stay healthy. How would you sum this up for both of you?

Glenn: Balance of family and balance of healthy thinking, if you will. And, obviously exercise and preventative care or preventative maintenance.

Mary: Surrounding yourself with people who can contribute positive energy one way or another. It's all about balance, which I haven't yet found. [Bono laughs]

Glenn: Go get your Jamba Juice.

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