

Weekly Address: The Legacy of Nancy Reagan

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Hello, everybody. This past week, we lost an American icon and one of the most influential figures of her time – former First Lady Nancy Reagan.

Born in New York City, and raised mostly in Chicago, Nancy Davis graduated from Smith College in 1943. As an actress, she appeared in 11 films. And off-screen, she starred in a real-life Hollywood romance with the love of her life, Ronald Reagan, whom she married in 1952.

As President, I know just how important it is to have a strong life partner, and President Reagan was as lucky as I am. Nancy Reagan redefined the role of First Lady of the United States. In addition to serving as a trusted advisor to her husband, and an elegant hostess for our nation, she was a passionate advocate for issues that touched the lives of so many. She raised awareness about drug and alcohol abuse. She was a staunch supporter of America's veterans. And after her own battle with breast cancer and a mastectomy, she spoke in personal terms about the need for women to get mammograms.

The American people were deeply moved by the love Nancy felt for her husband. And we were inspired by how, in their long goodbye, Nancy became a voice on behalf of millions of families experiencing the depleting, aching reality of Alzheimer's disease. She brought her characteristic intelligence and focus to the twin causes of stem cell research and Alzheimer's research. And when I signed an order to resume federal stem cell research, I was proud that she was one of the first phone calls I made. Nobody understood better than Nancy Reagan the importance of pursuing treatments that hold the potential and the promise to improve and save lives.

That's why, last year, my administration announced the Precision Medicine Initiative to advance our ability to tailor health care and treat diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's by accounting for individual differences in people's genes, environments, and lifestyles. Last month, we took new actions to foster more collaboration between researchers, doctors, patients, data systems, and beyond to accelerate precision medicine. And more than 40 organizations stepped up with new commitments in this cutting-edge field. We've also launched the BRAIN initiative to revolutionize our understanding of how the human brain works.

Thanks to the tireless efforts of people like Nancy Reagan, I've never been more optimistic that we are getting closer to the day when every single patient can get the care they need and deserve. I've never been more optimistic that we will one day find a cure for devastating diseases like Alzheimer's. And I can think of no better way to honor our former First Lady's legacy than by working together, as one nation, toward that goal. Thanks, everybody.