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Actress Puts Two Senators in Spotlight for Work Against Domestic Violence

By Nora Boustany

It was enough to make a pair of graying senators blush – and inject some human drama into the congressional summer doldrums.

Screen actress Salma Hayek lavished impassioned praise on Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) and Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-Del.) at a hearing Tuesday for their valiant efforts to combat the scourge of violence against women.

“Your unwavering support for the Violence Against Women Act on behalf of the victims of these crimes has made an enormous difference, Senators Specter and Biden,” Hayek said before the Senate Judiciary Committee. “Your courageous efforts to take on these terrible crimes have put trained police officers in communities that need them.”

Hayek said that although she had never been a victim of such abuse, she had witnessed the suffering of a friend who was beaten repeatedly by her husband but could not bring herself to leave him. She called her own inability to help that friend “a personal failure,” but said she then decided to help others, after visiting domestic violence shelters and listening to the stories of many battered women.

“I saw the impact that domestic violence had on their children. I began to see why it was so hard for them to leave,” she said, telling the story of a woman who was murdered on her wedding day in 1999 when a former boyfriend pushed his way through the wedding party and shot her.

“This is not love. It is a crime,” Hayek said. “You can’t look the other way just because you have not experienced domestic violence with your own flesh.”

The Mexican-born actress lauded the two senators for a number of efforts, delivering her testimony with an actress’s narrative flair.

“You have supported the work of prosecutors dedicated to holding the perpetrators of these crimes accountable,” she said. “You have funded programs that bring committed judges to the bench, and you have helped communities in the poorest and sometimes the most remote places to create a sheltering environment for the victims of these crimes,” Hayek told the committee members.

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