

# EVOLUTION of MARY BONO

## Former Congresswoman on the Past, Present and Politics

Pivoting and adapting to what's before you is a recurring theme for Mary Bono. Her life has been full of the unexpected.

She met her future husband, entertainer Sonny Bono, the day after she graduated from college. Sonny then famously entered politics in the late 1980s – first as the mayor of Palm Springs, California and then as a U.S. representative. He was just midway into a second term when he died in a 1998 skiing accident. Mary succeeded her husband in office and had a 15-year stint in Congress.

Post political life, Bono is as busy as ever with her work – as a principal for FaegreBD Consulting (a Washington, D.C. division of the Faegre Baker Daniels law firm) – and engaging in what matters most to her.

### Going for it

It wasn't an easy decision to run for Sonny's seat; Mary had two young children and worried about being both a "great mom and an effective member of Congress." Ironically, the voice that tipped the scales was her own mother's.

"She was a career woman and had given it up to be a stay-at-home mom and felt that she wished she would have stayed working. Her advice was, 'Run for this and if you don't like it, you can always not run again.'

"She was beginning early Alzheimer's or dementia, but when she was talking with me about this move, she was clear as a bell. She really broke through and wanted to give me this solid advice," Bono recalls. "It was my mom's words that put me over the top. But my dad was always my guiding light and my source of strength, especially after Sonny died."

### 'Things that I am'

It was her father's fervent belief in national security – he was a World War II veteran who flew more than 20 missions in Germany – that rubbed off on his daughter.

"I was very interested in strong foreign policy. In my first three years (in office) I was on the Armed Services Committee. And then I also worked on intellectual property rights. (I was) one of the early pioneers of protecting intellectual property rights in the digital age," Bono notes.

Her biggest platform, both in Congress and today, centers around prescription drug abuse and prevention. And the connection is intensely personal. While in high school, her son became hooked on painkillers.

"I got a call when he was a freshman in college. He called and said, 'Mom I've become addicted to pain pills and I need your help.' I was very lucky to get that call."

Once mother and son went public about the dangers of "partying with pain pills, or kids thinking it was the safe alternative to illicit drugs," Bono became a national voice for parents going through the same thing.

"The federal agencies tasked with controlling prescription drugs and opioids were failing. So I began sort of ringing the bell to get people to pay attention to this epidemic. Now, as we know, this is something that has happened in your state. There is not a portion of America that is immune from this prescription drug problem.

"I used to say in Congress there are things you do and things that you are. This is apparently one of the things I am," she concludes.

In fact, Bono's first thought after she lost her re-election bid was wondering if it meant her push and influence in this arena would come to a halt. "But the next day, I got a call from the White House asking me if I would continue my work and join the board of one of these charitable organizations. It put me right back to work on the drug issue."



"... But in my view, the biggest principle of all is that the American people expect their government to work. I just tried to keep my head down and actually get things done and never worried about running out to the cameras to make political points."

### Present day

Bono had a "whole host of opportunities" before her in 2013, but was impressed with the leaders at FaegreBD Consulting, who recruited her over a period of time.

FaegreBD, with approximately 50 professionals, has the power of the Faegre Baker Daniels' affiliation. The Baker & Daniels' portion of the international firm (14 offices) dates back to 1863 in Indianapolis.

"I was attracted to them because of the thoughtful leadership they had. They're very serious with their work product, very good at what they do and very supportive as a team. (Initially), Faegre brought me on board to help open our Palo Alto campus and work in technology – to plant the flag in California, which we've done very effectively," she explains.

"Finally, one of my colleagues and managing partner, said, 'Mary, do what you're good at doing. ... How can we help you?' They've been nothing but encouraging and fully supportive. They've bought on to this challenge about helping treatment, recovery and prevention."

That endeavor keeps her the busiest, but she's also involved in consulting on energy, health care, telecommunications and privacy issues, among others.

What Bono brings to the table is fairly unique, offers David Zook, managing partner of Faegre Baker Daniels' D.C. office and chair of FaegreBD Consulting.

"Mary can deploy both vertically (as an expert) around areas but also horizontally because of her visibility and relationships. It's important to have people like Mary who can deliver on both for clients," he states.

Bono has teamed with colleagues to prep business leaders on

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effective advocacy strategies with Congress and provide political updates, including at Indiana Chamber D.C. Fly-in events in recent years.

If any spare time emerges, you are likely to find Bono outdoors. She enjoys hiking and has a love-hate relationship with golf – “often in the same round.”

In late September, Bono married for a fourth time – to former astronaut and retired Navy Admiral Stephen Scot Oswald. “This one hopefully will break the pattern and last forever,” she offers with good humor.

### All about politics

The conduct of elected officials in the nation’s capital or those trying to get there is still very much on Bono’s radar screen. She believes the era of bipartisanship is all but gone because of the rise of talk radio and political television shows.

“They’re not interested in common sense folks who actually get the work done. They want people that will jam things up and be inflammatory and drive the ratings. And it’s become a really difficult position for politicians, because the minute you compromise Fox News, CNN and MSNBC are going to attack and say you’re giving up on your principles,” Bono asserts.

“But in my view, the biggest principle of all is that the American people expect their government to work. I just tried to keep my head down and actually get things done and never worried about running out to the cameras to make political points.”

As for the Republican Party, Bono says there is beginning to be a bit of a correction. “(For example), I don’t believe the Tea Party is as strong as it was a few years ago. I think (organizations) like the Chamber of Commerce

are saying we need an efficient government to run this country and when it doesn’t, it takes a toll on Main Street; it takes a toll on the family.”

Though not yet on board with any presidential campaign, she’s looking forward to the Republican “herd thinning out” so the “messages from the real contenders can break through.”

Bono is also candid about having some reservation about those running who haven’t held public office.

“You just don’t wake up and become president of the United States without understanding the political process, the governing process, the international process. (That’s necessary because) as we learned on 9/11, sometimes our weakest point as a country (for terrorism) is when we have a new president.

“So I do look for somebody with experience. I don’t believe we have time for anybody to come up to speed.”

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**RESOURCES:** Mary Bono and David Zook, FaegreBD Consulting, at [www.faegrebd.com](http://www.faegrebd.com)