

Oversight of the Committee on Environment and Public Works is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, June 13, 2018, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing entitled "Oversight of the Army Corps' Regulation of Surplus Water and the Roles of States' Rights."

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my law clerk, Charlotte Schwartz, be granted floor privileges for the length of my remarks during today's session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Frank Tedeschi and Steven Fowler, defense fellows in Senator ROUNDS's office, be granted floor privileges for the remainder of the day.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, JUNE 14, 2018

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 9:30 a.m., Thursday, June 14; further, that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed. Finally, I ask that following leader remarks, the Senate resume consideration of H.R. 5515, with the time until the cloture vote equally divided between the two managers or their designees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order following the remarks of Senators MERKLEY and SASSE.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Oregon.

ASYLUM POLICY

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, for generations, the Statue of Liberty—Lady Liberty we like to call her—has stood as a symbol of how open America has been to treating those fleeing oppression when they arrive on the shores of America. We hear those famous words written by Emma Lazarus: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." That is a vision that we can connect to because virtually every American family has family roots tied to

immigrants and tied to people pursuing freedom and fleeing oppression—fleeing religious oppression, fleeing civil war, fleeing famine—but who come to the refuge of the United States of America, knowing that here they could be treated well and have a fair chance to thrive.

In modern times, we have converted this into an asylum policy. An asylum policy means, if you are truly fleeing repression, oppression—if you are truly fleeing danger and your life would be in danger if you returned—you could gain admission into the United States of America. In fact, we put into international treaties and into national law—there it is—the torch, the beacon, that signals to the world that we stand for human rights.

Yet now we are in a new and different place. On May 7, our Attorney General announced a dramatic change that is completely contrary to the Statue of Liberty. What the Attorney General put forward was, should you flee oppression overseas and find yourself washed up on the shores of the United States of America, we will not greet you with a fair chance to present your case and thrive. Instead, we will grab you, treat you as a criminal, rip your children out of your arms, and lock you up. That is the new policy. That is the Jeff Sessions-Donald Trump-John Kelly policy of the United States of America.

When I heard about this, I didn't really believe it was possible that any administration could adopt a policy of inflicting deliberate trauma on children. There is no moral code in the world that supports such an action, and there is no religious tradition on our beautiful planet that supports such an action. Yet there it was—the decision to create a deterrence for people to come to our shores by our mistreating the children who had already arrived. Mistreat the child today, and deter some family abroad from ever thinking about coming. That is a dark stain on America, this strategy of deliberate harm to children.

Last Sunday, a week ago Sunday, I went down to find out if this were really true. I went to a detention center and gained admission to the detention center. The detention center is a large space that is split into different cells—you can call them cells—of fencing. There are fencing posts, and there is chain link fencing. The first room that I went into had smaller cells, maybe 12 by 12 or 15 by 15. They looked like cages. People were just arriving and being put into them.

It is, really, deeply saddening to see the terror in their eyes, the tears on their cheeks. They didn't know what was going to happen to them. Then they went through a series of desks, at which they were interviewed—many by computers because they were talking to people far afield, somewhere across the United States. They were being interviewed by electronic connection.

Then they were taken to a very large room, a warehouse-styled room. This is

not the facility I was in, and this is not a 2018 picture, but it looks very much like what I saw. Since people are not allowed to enter the facility with any camera now, I am using this picture to share with you approximately what it looks like. There are the same green pads. There are the same space blankets. There are the same chain links. There is the same fencing. There is a sad, big room.

Now, what is there today in terms of that physical structure is no different than what was there in the last administration. That isn't the issue. The issue is how that is being put to work, because under this new policy, instead of treating families seeking asylum with respect until they have their hearing, instead of keeping families together so if they do gain admission into the United States they will be in good shape and they will be in good care, we are inflicting harm on them, harm on the parents, and harm on the children.

Any child psychological expert will tell you that when people have fled trauma abroad, perhaps gone over some very tough hurdles to the United States, the one thing they hang on to is the parent's hand, the father's hand or mother's hand—that close connection that they will see this through together. It is the one little sphere of safety in a big, dangerous world.

Then, in a room like this, after they have gone through the processing desks, the children are ripped out of their parents' arms. Their parents are incarcerated in one of these divided cells and children in another. They may not be able to see each other across the warehouse. They don't know what is going to happen.

So when I was in a room that looked very much like this a week ago Sunday, I was standing in front of a big cell that held just young boys, and they were lining up. They were lining up to be able to get some food, and they were told to line up from the smallest to the largest. That made a pretty dramatic picture with the smallest tyke in front, knee-high to a grasshopper, maybe 4 or 5 years old. Then, older boys lined up, maybe through 16 or 17 years old. As you stare at this group of children and see this group of children, you realize that some of them are unaccompanied minors. They arrived in the United States by themselves. But there are others. Within the previous 24 hours or maybe just a couple hours before you were present, that child was separated from his or her parents. I asked about the dramatic scenes that come from this—the wailing children and the frantic parents. I was told that happens occasionally, but not so often.

Then I heard the stories of how the children are now being separated, and I don't know how often this happens or if this is the way it is being done. But the parents are told: We are taking your child to the bathroom or we are taking your child for a bath, and the child