SUBCOMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SECURITY, PENSIONS, AND FAMILY POLICY

The Subcommittee on Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy of the Committee on Finance is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, July 11, 2018, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing entitled ''Examining the Importance of Paid Family Leave for American Working Families''.

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my intern, Whitney Wagner, have privileges of the floor for the remainder of the day.

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

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2018

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m. on Thursday, July 12; 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; further, that following leader remarks, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Ney nomination; finally, that notwithstanding rule XXII, all postcloture time on the nomination expire at 1:30 p.m.

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

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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 RUBIO and MERKLEY.

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

The Senator from Florida.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN FLORIDA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, my home State of Florida is once again experiencing an environmental and economic catastrophe—a real crisis. It is a crisis that was caused extending back decades—decades of bad decisions, decisions made on things people didn't think about, neglect, and myopic water management. Nowhere is that crisis more acute and more apparent than at Lake Okeechobee, the liquid heart of the Everglades, and our surrounding communities, including the city of Stuart, which is on the verge of seeing conditions very similar to what they experienced in the year 2016.

That is what this picture here is about. What we see on this photo is algae—thick, toxic algae—that was gathering underneath that bridge back in 2016.

This really goes back decades. The historic Florida Everglades—the head waters began in Lake Okeechobee. This massive lake, this reservoir, is right in the center of our State. What would happen is when rainfall would come in and when water would overflow, it would just continue to flow south into the Everglades and down into the Florida Bay. But then people began to move in and develop Florida, and therefore there was a need for the Army Corps to step in and carefully script the flow of water in the southern half of Florida.

This all began since the construction of something called the Herbert Hoover Dike and then, subsequently, the development beginning in 1948 of the Central and South Florida projects to manage flood risks. Unfortunately, this flood control system that was designed to keep the water from coming out of Lake Okeechobee and flooding communities to the south of it has significant limitations and neglects to use the Everglades' natural flow wave. That is why Everglades restoration is something that, apart from ecosystem and wildlife benefits, is so critically important for our Nation and for my State of Florida. Everglades restoration is not simply about restoring a national treasure, it is also about allowing much more flexibility for water management at greatly reduced costs and at reduced harm to coastal communities.

The best way to understand it for those who are new to this issue is that we have this massive lake. The lake used to overflow, and when it did, the water would flow down. Communities and agriculture moved into the southern part of the State, just south of that lake; therefore, there was a need to construct a dam to hold back the water and prevent the flooding and loss of life, which is natural, and then a canal system to allow the waters to flow east and west.

The problem that has developed over the years is what we are dealing with now, and that is that as of today, when water levels in Lake Okeechobee rise too high, that water must be released in massive quantities. Today, the water levels are over 4½ feet deep—a full 2 feet higher than the Corps would prefer at this time of year as the rainy season kicks in. So they look at the dike and they look at its capacity and they worry that, knowing it is going to continue to rain throughout the summer, if the water levels get too high, we could have the dike compromised, and we could have flooding and loss of life. Therefore, they are forced to release water.

Last year, as an example, we saw large amounts of water and rainwater. Among other causes, of course, was Hurricane Irma, which caused Lake Okeechobee to rise to record-high levels. Again this year, Florida has experienced large amounts of rain. This rainfall carries nutrients into the lake from upstream.

The lake is in the center part of the State. Just north of it are areas such as Kissimmee and Orlando and population. People move in and fertilize their lawns, and all kinds of nutrients get into the groundwater. It rains, and it flows into Lake Okeechobee. The more it rains, the more it flows out. So the water level of the lake gets higher, and the nutrient flow into the lake also gets higher.

As we can see from these time-lapse images, when that nutrient-rich water flows in on top of the nutrient-rich water that is already there—and heat comes into play—the result is algae blooms. That is where it was on the 12th of June. This is where it was on the 20th. All of that red represents algae. This is where it was on the 21st and then on the 24th. If you looked at an image of this today, almost the entire lake is covered by thick, toxic algae.

To make sure there is no damage or threat to the dike, which itself is being worked on in order to strengthen it, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers releases water from the lake to the east to the St. Lucie River and to the west to the Caloosahatchee River. We remember it used to flow south, and now it has been diverted into these canal systems to the east and to the west. So if you are living to the west or if you are living to the east, what you know is that when these releases happen, all of that algae you see here and all of that green algae I just showed you in that picture, which is toxic and kills life, not to mention—it is harmful to people who come into contact with it, potentially even breathe it in, and all of that stuff is headed your way when those releases happen.

Unfortunately, those discharges have a catastrophic impact on the environment and on the Floridians living along our coastal ecosystems. They are especially destructive when these releases export, as I said, nutrient-rich waters with toxic blue-green algae blooms from the lake to the waterways and the estuaries that are downstream because there, those blooms—that algae, which kills fish, fouls the water, and shutters all sorts of small businesses along the coast, has a tremendous negative impact on property values, the real estate market. It creates respiratory irritation for people as well as contact dermatitis for residents who get too close to it.

Imagine you live in this area. Maybe you are a small business that depends on visitors. Maybe you invested a lot of money to retire near the water. Maybe you grew up there or lived your entire life there or spent summers there, or maybe your greatest memories are of times your family spent on the water, and this is headed your way. I assure you that this does not increase your property values; it collapses them. I assure you that it does not encourage