

NATIONAL ASSISTIVE
TECHNOLOGY AWARENESS DAY

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 103, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 103) designating March 27, 2019, as "National Assistive Technology Awareness Day."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to proceeding to the measure?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. BOOZMAN. I further ask that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 103) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

MEASURE PLACED ON THE
CALENDAR—S. 729

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I understand that there is a bill at the desk that is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

The clerk will read the title of the bill for the second time.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 729) to prohibit the use of funds to Federal agencies to establish a panel, task force, advisory committee, or other effort to challenge the scientific consensus on climate change, and for other purposes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

ORDERS FOR TUESDAY, MARCH 12,
2019

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m. Tuesday, March 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, morning business be closed, and the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Matey nomination under the previous order; finally, that the Senate recess from 12:30 p.m. until 2:15 p.m. to allow for the weekly conference meetings.

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

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. BOOZMAN. 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 our Democratic colleagues.

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

The Senator from Oregon.

CENTRAL AMERICA

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, it was a powerful opportunity to join my colleague from Delaware, Senator CARPER, in traveling to the Northern Triangle of Central America—Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—to try to understand more about the dynamics in that region, which are driving so many families to come north, to take the difficult journey through Central America, through Mexico, to come to our border and to ask for asylum.

This has been a significant flow, which has expanded greatly. We have seen in the past that most of those arriving on our border were men from Mexico who were seeking work but not so much now. Now we have this flow of families from Central America. These families are traveling to find something better for their lives and for their children's lives. It is not an easy journey, and it is a journey that has created quite a conversation here in the United States of America.

The conversation coming from our President has been this: How do we stop them from asserting asylum at the border?

President Trump has a number of strategies to deter families from coming. His strategy was to separate children from their parents, treat those fleeing as criminals, create great trauma for the children, and use this as a strategy of deterrence. This was first laid out very clearly by John Kelly just months into the administration. In March of 2017, he said: Yes, this is exactly what we are considering.

The administration then proceeded to implement it first as a pilot project and later as an all-out strategy to treat those migrating as criminals, lock up the parents, separate the children, inflict trauma, and deter people from coming. I can state that any strategy that involves mistreating children as a political tactic—a political message of deterrence—is simply evil. It comes from a very, very dark place in the heart of this administration to deliberately injure children in this fashion.

Why doesn't the President look to Central America and ask: What is motivating these families to come? How can we change that motivation? What are the forces at work in that region?

Those were the questions that Senator CARPER and I were undertaking to

answer on our recent trip, and I appreciate so much that he went through the great work of organizing it.

We went first to Guatemala, then to Honduras, then to El Salvador. We met with the President. We met with the incoming President of El Salvador. We met with the civil society organizations—those who understand the roots of what is going on within the society—and here is what we learned. We learned there were three powerful forces driving families to leave those countries: security, economics, and corruption.

Let's talk a little bit about those three things.

Security. I had the chance to meet a woman and her daughter, Gabriella and her baby Andrea. Gabriella told me about her journey. She said that her family took a loan from a private bank, which probably meant a financial loan from the local drug cartel or financial group associated with a drug cartel. The family wasn't able to repay the loan. They were given a deadline. They were told: If you don't repay the loan, one of your family members dies, and that will be you, Gabriella.

Gabriella was pregnant. She figured that as long as she was pregnant, they would not kill her. So when she was 8 months pregnant—1 month ago—she fled the country to save herself and to save her baby.

I met her and her baby on the border. They had just crossed the bridge into the United States of America. I asked her: How did you get past the American border guards, who wouldn't allow anyone across the bridge if they didn't have a passport or visa? Her face lit up for a moment. She said: Well, I was rebuffed time and again at the center of the bridge, not allowed to come across and assert asylum, and I was desperate, blocked on the Mexican side.

Then I saw there was a pedestrian bridge and a car bridge, and on the car bridge were folks who were washing windows for tips. So I asked to use an extra squeegee from one of the window washers, who gave it to me, and I washed windows on the car bridge to get into the United States of America. And there she was at the foot of the bridge with her baby.

She told me that because she fled with her baby, those who were enforcing that private loan from that private bank killed her uncle. That is the security issue that comes with all of the various versions of that story.

I met another woman, Patricia. Patricia had a 14-year-old daughter. Patricia had to pay extortion money. The President of Guatemala told me that every business has to pay extortion money. In this case, though, Patricia had no money left to pay the extortion. So the drug gang—or the gang that controls the streets and runs the extortion—came to her house and assaulted her 14-year-old daughter. So she fled. She fled to protect her daughter from any other such horrific circumstances. She came to the United States.

That is a security issue. This is not a situation where if you don't pay the extortion money, they break your window. This is: If you don't pay the extortion money, we kill you; we rape your daughter; we kill your family—maybe we torture them. That is the security issue.

Then there is the economic issue. In Guatemala, the median age is 18. I believe they said it is the youngest median age on the planet. A huge number of young people are coming into working age, and while they are working to create jobs, they are not possibly creating enough jobs. So you have this huge number of people without jobs. What are they going to do?

I will state that one thing they do is go hungry. Malnutrition is a horrendous demon haunting the country of Guatemala. One individual showed us a picture of Guatemalan children against a wall and their average heights; they had lines across the wall for their heights. They had a similar picture of Guatemalan children being raised in the United States. It was to dramatize the fact that the children growing up in Guatemala at age 9 are 6 inches shorter than the Guatemalan children growing up in the United States at the same age. It is stunting—stunting from persistent malnutrition. So joblessness and malnutrition, an insufficient network of schools and trained schoolteachers—all of these things are economic challenges.

Let me tell you, it is not just the fact that you don't have a job. It is that in your small village across the country—across all three countries—you may see on a street, as was described to us, a shack, a second shack, a third shack, a fourth shack, and then a beautiful house. That beautiful house was there because somebody in that village made it to the United States of America, and they have been sending back money year after year in sufficient quantities that the family is now prosperous. They can build that beautiful house.

That beautiful house stands as a billboard. It is an advertisement for what might happen if you can make it to the United States and get a job. So on the one hand, there are no jobs, and on the other hand, this beacon of hope is saying to you: If you can make it across the border, you might be able to be prosperous yourself and, basically, enable your entire family to be prosperous.

Then we have corruption. This isn't garden variety corruption. For generations—for hundreds of years—there has been a class in these countries that is beyond the law. They call their efforts to change this a campaign against impunity. That is not a word we use a lot in America—"impunity"—but it means individuals who are never touched by the legal system. They can do whatever they want. They pay no fines. They never go to prison. They suck money out of the country. They suck money out of all of those layers of the economy below them. They have become

extraordinarily rich. They talk about the 8 families in Guatemala and the 14 families in El Salvador.

So that corruption we have been working to take on. We, the United States, in partnership with the governments there, have been working to take that on. So those three things—security, the economy, and corruption—are the factors driving people to flee north.

A few years ago, then-Vice President Biden went to Central America to understand those issues better. Out of that came the Alliance for Prosperity—the Alliance for Prosperity—a strategy based on Plan Colombia, as my colleague from Delaware laid out, that would strengthen the programs to take on the security issues, to take on the corruption issues, to take on the economic challenges that are draining those countries so that people didn't feel that to survive, they had to flee north.

We funded this at a modest level in fiscal year 2016. It was \$754 million. Think of that as it compares to money we have been spending on the border—billions and billions and billions of dollars for physical infrastructure, for border security, for high-tech sensors, for a system of courts to adjudicate asylum, all of that. We spent only about three-quarters of a billion dollars to strengthen those three countries.

Along comes the Trump administration, which says that it is concerned—very concerned—about this flow of people coming from Central America to our border, and they propose a 34-percent cut in this program. They propose cutting it from \$754 million to a proposal of \$460 million. Well, the Democrats and Republicans restored funding, put it back, not quite to the \$750 million number but to \$627 million.

The Trump budget came out the next year and cut it again; they proposed a 30-percent cut. Again, here in Congress, we worked to restore those programs, not where they were before but, basically, \$100 million more than the Trump administration asked for.

So to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: Doesn't it make sense for us to support the Alliance for Prosperity? For each dollar we send, they provide between \$4 and \$7; that is \$4 to \$7 in very poor countries.

Doesn't it make sense to support the commissions against impunity, the commissions against corruption? In the last 2 years, the Trump administration has been undermining these commissions against corruption. Well, that is just wrong.

The result, as you saw in El Salvador, was the election of the mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele, a very young fellow in his thirties. What did he run on? Taking on corruption, taking on impunity. Shouldn't we be a partner with them in this?

If we don't want families to flee north, then we shouldn't want the elite to operate with impunity and suck all

of the resources out of the country and leave people starving. Let's partner with the governments there to take on corruption, not undermine these commissions of support.

A trip to Central America will make you really appreciate our institutions, our economy, our education system, our healthcare system, our court system, our opportunities for our children. We can do far better, for sure, but every piece of what we have that works so much better than those parallel systems in Central America calls out to those there to come and participate in our society. If we want families to stay where they are, they are going to have to have an opportunity where they are, which means we have to take on the security issues, including the street-level extortion. We have to help them take those on. We have to help them improve their economy and their education system. We have to help them take on the systemic, high-level, massive corruption that drives resources into the hands of the very few at the expense of the very many.

That is the mission we should be talking about here on the floor—wrestling with here on the floor. Maybe we shouldn't return to the levels that Obama had that we had passed in a bipartisan way here. Maybe we should double what was done in 2016—or triple—if we really want to help anchor those societies' rudders that have people fleeing for their lives to come here.

THE EQUALITY ACT

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I speak now to a bill we will introduce this Wednesday, the Equality Act. The Equality Act will be introduced by a group of us in the Senate and by another group led by Congressman CICILLINE in the House.

It is an appropriate moment for us to ponder in this Chamber why this piece of legislation is part of our American journey toward the vision of opportunity for all and why we all should be supporting this beautiful legislative proposal.

My involvement in the Equality Act began in my home State of Oregon, when I was serving in the legislature there, and we had the question of how can we change the systematic discrimination against our LGBTQ brothers and sisters. How can we give them the same opportunity everyone else has?

So we came together and said we should do an Oregon Equality Act, an Oregon Equality Act that would create the same basic protections the Civil Rights Act has for race and gender and ethnicity.

We went about doing that. I was the speaker. I worked very hard to make that happen, and we succeeded. We ended discrimination in Oregon based on who you are or whom you love. Discrimination should be ended across the whole country.

I arrived here in January 2009, and I was assigned to the Health, Education,