

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,

Labor, and Pensions Committee—the Health Committee. I asked Senator Kennedy if I could possibly serve on this committee to help fight for health and education and labor, and he arranged that. I will never forget having his voicemail on my phone saying: Yes, you are a member of the committee.

A few months later came the real surprise. Senator Kennedy was struggling with the brain cancer that killed him later that year, and through his team, he asked me to take on one of his civil rights bills, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

That was to end discrimination for LGBTQ Americans in employment, give them a fair chance to get a job here. Well, this is something that had been part of our Equality Act in Oregon. We had gotten that done, and because I helped lead that fight, he asked me to take over and lead the fight to end employment nondiscrimination.

That was 2009. It took 4 years of work—work with the community and work with our legislators inside this building. Then, finally, in 2013, the time was ripe to put it on the floor and have this debate. This Chamber, with the supermajority, bipartisan vote, said, yes, let's end discrimination in employment, and we passed the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

Then I went over to the House, and it died without consideration. I got together with the advocates and asked, where do we go from here with the House not acting? Do we simply continue to reintroduce the Employment Non-Discrimination Act—which had been first introduced in 1996, first considered on this floor and almost passed just one vote short in 1998. Do we continue to do that?

Out of that conversation, we developed a different vision. Let's do a full Equality Act like Oregon has done, like a number of other States have done and end discrimination not just in one sector or another, not just in places of accommodation, not just in financial transactions, not just in serving on a jury, not just in terms of housing, not just in terms of employment, let's base the Equality Act on providing the full spectrum, the full measure of protection for opportunity.

I thought that was a pretty good idea. Later that year, I introduced the Equality Act in partnership with many others. We laid out that first Equality Act in the Johnson Room—the Johnson Room, which looks out at the Supreme Court and reminds us of 1964. In 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was passed, driven forward by President Johnson, who came from Texas, who came from the South, and said: It is time to end discrimination in the United States of America based on race and gender and ethnicity. He drove that legislation through, and it has been a foundation we haven't questioned since because we know it is right. We know it is part of

this journey of the United States of America going back to our Declaration of Independence, going back to our Constitution—a vision of opportunity for all and liberty for all.

We know it was imperfect, and we have worked now for almost two and a half centuries to perfect that vision of opportunity. Senator Ted Kennedy once said: “The promise of America will never be fulfilled as long as justice is denied to even one among us.” The promise of America—that promise of America that Thomas Jefferson so eloquently put, in 1776—is a vision where we are all created equal, with “unalienable Rights . . . Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

How can that vision be propelled, sustained, and promoted if, in fact, as you pursue your life, the door is slammed shut on you, saying, “No. There is opportunity for that individual but not you,” and the door is slammed shut—liberty for that person but not you, and the door is slammed shut.

We have come to understand that is just wrong. It is completely incompatible with the vision that was laid out, the vision of our Declaration and the vision of our Constitution.

In fact, in this Chamber, we start with a pledge, and we talk about one Nation under God with liberty and justice for all. Classrooms across the country start their day with a pledge of liberty and justice for all, but what is liberty if the door is slammed shut? That is the denial of liberty. That is the opposite of freedom. That is the crushing of opportunity.

So the story of America goes forward. The fight goes forward. We had the 1964 Civil Rights Act that was a culmination itself of decades of work. We had the voting rights struggle during the same time period, and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. We fought a number of battles—battles of discrimination against those with disabilities. We fought for workers' rights, but our LGBTQ brothers and sisters still face discrimination all across this country. We are still in a situation where so many doors are slammed shut.

We have had a lot of progress in the last 10 years. Ten years ago, we had the Defense of Marriage Act, and now we don't. We had don't ask, don't tell in the military, and now we don't. We had only three States that recognized same-sex marriage, and now it is the law of the land as the Supreme Court weighed in and said it is required by the vision of our Constitution.

Discrimination in all kinds of ways is still legal in 29 States—more than half the country. In more than half the country, you can be married in the morning, denied service at a restaurant for lunch, fired from your job in the afternoon, and kicked out of your apartment that night because discrimination is still legal against LGBTQ Americans in 29 States.

LBJ gave a definition of freedom. He said: “Freedom is the right to be treated in every part of our national life as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.” Discrimination is the opposite of freedom.

Let freedom ring in this Chamber as we introduce the Equality Act later this week. Let freedom ring down the hall as the House of Representatives holds a debate in committee and on the floor in the months to come, and when that freedom bell rings so loudly that they pass that bill, the Equality Act in that Chamber, let them bring it down this hallway right into the Senate; that we might debate the same and put an end to the extraordinary, disgraceful discrimination that still marks the lives and slams the doors shut on millions and millions of Americans every single day.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:27 p.m., adjourned until Tuesday, March 12, 2019, at 10 a.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

DAVID BERNHARDT, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, VICE RYAN ZINKE.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

JOHN LINDER, OF GEORGIA, TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS, WITH THE RANK AND STATUS OF AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY.

INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

JENNIFER D. NORDQUIST, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE UNITED STATES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT FOR A TERM OF TWO YEARS, VICE MATTHEW T. MCGUIRE, TERM EXPIRED.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE

JOHN MCLEOD BARGER, OF CALIFORNIA, TO BE A GOVERNOR OF THE UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE FOR A TERM EXPIRING DECEMBER 8, 2021, VICE LOUIS J. GIULIANO, TERM EXPIRED.

THE JUDICIARY

RAINEY R. BRANDT, OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, TO BE AN ASSOCIATE JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FOR THE TERM OF FIFTEEN YEARS, VICE JUDITH NAN MACALUSO, RETIRED.

SHANA FROST MATINI, OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, TO BE AN ASSOCIATE JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FOR THE TERM OF FIFTEEN YEARS, VICE ZOE BUSH, RETIRED.

MICHAEL S. BOGREN, OF MICHIGAN, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN, VICE ROBERT HOLMES BELL, RETIRED.

JEFFREY VINCENT BROWN, OF TEXAS, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, VICE MELINDA HARMON, RETIRED.

STEPHANIE DAWKINS DAVIS, OF MICHIGAN, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN, VICE GERALD E. ROSEN, RETIRED.

BRANTLEY STARR, OF TEXAS, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS, VICE SIDNEY A. FITZWATER, RETIRED.