

Spike. Today, another dedicated woman has been behind its sesquicentennial celebration, Spike 150. Aimee McConkie, carrying the banner previously carried by Anna Judah and Bernice Gibbs Anderson, has been a driving force in our State and in her community. A BYU graduate, a wife, and mother of four daughters, Aimee has worked for 15 years in professional association management.

In 2005 she founded Utah Venture Outdoors, a summer festival series in Millcreek, UT. For 14 years, she volunteered her time and her resources to this event, seeking to bring the community together through recreational opportunities.

In 2017 she also launched LABELED, a 4-day film festival that seeks to break the stigma around mental health issues. Now she has once again brought her community together for an important cause—this time, to celebrate and commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Golden Spike.

Under her leadership as director of Spike 150, there are events taking place not only around Promontory Summit but also around the entire State of Utah—events to highlight the history and legacy of the Golden Spike, events for children and families, and events for music, art, and train enthusiasts.

It has taken tremendous amounts of organization, coordination, and perseverance, and it would no doubt make Bernice Gibbs Anderson proud. At the 1957 celebration of the Golden Spike, she said:

This is sacred soil, dedicated to the sacrifices of the thousands who labored in the great race to build the first transcontinental railway in the shortest possible time. . . . The destiny of this nation rode triumphant upon the rails that met at Promontory Station! The future of this site depends on you, my friends. Will it take its rightful place in the heritage and traditions of America . . . or will it remain desolate and forgotten to sink into oblivion[?]

Thanks to the work of people like Aimee McConkie, we know that the Golden Spike will not sink into oblivion but will indeed take its rightful place in history.

Anna Judah, Bernice Gibbs Anderson, and Aimee McConkie might have lived at different times, but there is a common thread that runs throughout their stories: the triumph of ordinary people, of the hidden heroes behind so many of our great achievements in history.

Without the work of these ordinary Americans and Utahns, we never could have achieved one of the most transformative events in our Nation thus far: the driving of the Golden Spike and the completion of the first transcontinental railroad. And without the work of these hidden heroes, we could never reasonably hope and expect to be able to keep this legacy alive.

It is our task now to take up the banner that these women have carried—the banner of innovation, perseverance, and unity—and to ensure that our remarkable heritage lives on. If we do, there is no telling what Utah and our great Nation can achieve together.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BRAUN). The Senator from Tennessee.

BORDER SECURITY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I wanted to spend just a few minutes today speaking with my colleagues and also with Tennesseans about an issue that we hear so very much about every single day. The issue continues to persist. It is our border, and we all know—and, indeed, you read in news count after news count—that yes, indeed, there is a crisis at our border.

Just a few months ago, we had some of our friends who are in the other Chamber who kept saying: Oh, this is manufactured; oh, there is nothing to it.

But as we hear from law enforcement professionals, as we hear from ICE, from DHS, and from the Border Patrol, we have a crisis. Our border is strained to the breaking point.

The real humanitarian crisis at the border is escalating. There are people who are being brought in through Central America, through Mexico, and they are stranded in the desert without food and without water. During the summer, sometimes you have temperatures above 100 degrees.

Our border is at a breaking point, and it is, indeed, time for this body to do something about it and to support these Agencies that are on the front-line dealing with this crisis every single day.

What we know from our hearing that we held yesterday at the Senate Judiciary Committee is that ICE is facing mounting challenges when it comes to expediting the deportations that need to take place. Abuse and exploitation of the asylum process overburdens our court system as illegal immigrants flood our borders claiming persecution.

Our country historically welcomes people who are fleeing political persecution, but there have to be tighter rules on these asylum seekers. The percentage of those who have valid asylum claims is actually relatively low compared to the number who are applying for these protections. I will tell you that I welcome President Trump's moves to raise the standards.

Last week, the President directed the Department of Homeland Security to enact several new asylum changes. As part of these new policies, the President imposed a new deadline for the immigration courts to meet. He directed that cases in immigration courts be settled within 180 days of those being filed.

Tennesseans want to see government accountability. They want to see it across every Agency. Certainly, when it comes to immigration policy, they want this accountability. They know that with a 6-month deadline, it is exactly the kind of accountability that is needed.

Here is the problem that ICE is facing when it comes to meeting that 180-day standard. Right now, as of yester-

day at our hearing, they had more than 800,000 cases that were pending. Think about that. Your court system has 800,000 cases that are pending. There are exactly 400 immigration judges that are there to hear these 800,000 cases. Do the math on that. Think about how many cases that would be.

It is a 2-year wait at this point to get the case heard. So ICE needs additional judges. That means they need additional officers, and that means they need additional funding in order to meet the load.

I asked Director Asher how long it would take them to ramp up in order to be able to hear these 800,000 cases. She said: months, maybe a year, maybe a little bit longer. It depends on when they get the authorization to expand the court system. It depends on when they get the funding for it.

All of this time, what continues to happen? Cases continue to be piled onto that backlog. If we took action today, and if we approved their ability to expand their capacity to have more judges, to have more agents, to have more officers, and to have more resources, it would be a year by the time we worked through this process. It might be as many as 1.5 million cases that they are working on.

This is one of the reasons that it is imperative that we close some of the loopholes that are being used in the asylum process and work through closing these loopholes to help secure this border. It is something that would be of assistance to those who are trying to meet the need that is there from people crushing our border, putting that foot on American soil, and claiming asylum and persecution.

Another thing we talked about in yesterday's hearing is trafficking. We all know that cartels are big business. Cartels deal in trafficking drugs. They deal in trafficking human beings, which is disgusting, and they look at human beings to move them for labor trafficking, for sex trafficking, and for gangs. They look at that as part of their business.

I know Senator CRUZ talked about his EL CHAPO Act, which would allow those seized assets from these drug lords to be used to help pay to secure that border, because stopping this trafficking is something that is an imperative. It really is true that until we secure this southern border every town is, in essence, a border town and every State is a border State because illegal immigration no longer is a problem that is confined to those States that are on the border. We see this all across our country, and it is heartbreaking—you talk about the trafficking of human beings, the sex trafficking, and the effect that has on girls, when you talk about the drug trafficking and the heartbreaking effects that has on families in every single one of our communities. Opioids, fentanyl, heroin—we all see it.

God bless our local law enforcement. Next week we are going to honor our

law enforcement, but God bless them for the work they do in our communities. Here is a good example. Just this past January, our Customs and Border Patrol seized the largest amount of fentanyl in the agency's history ever—largest amount. They seized nearly 254 pounds of fentanyl from a Mexican national trying to enter the United States. It was enough to kill more than 115 million people. That is the volume that 1 person was bringing over—enough fentanyl to kill 115 million people. This is why we have to make certain we secure that border.

As I mentioned, the trafficking of human beings is taking place. Another of the problems is that many adult sponsors who are seeking custody of children are here illegally themselves. The traffickers have adults grab a child; they are coming to the border. The child is then transferred to someone else in the country, and that individual is here illegally. It is difficult to find out how that child is connected to the adult they are taken to. Sometimes it could be a labor gang. Sometimes it could be a prostitution ring. We don't know. I commend the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services, which are taking steps to close a big loophole here. Last April, the two agencies entered into an agreement to ensure that relatives of these children are not above the law. Under the agreement, DHS and HHS promised to share information about these adult sponsors so that ICE can run criminal and immigration background checks on them. This agreement is a powerful tool in the fight to stop trafficking of migrant children. So long as law enforcement can keep running these criminal background checks on these sponsors, we can hold more adults accountable and keep these children safe.

Finally, I want to touch on the wall because Border Patrol Chief Provost told me during the hearing yesterday that the wall was working. The San Diego sector has 14 miles of the new double fencing that has been approved by Congress. It is the first of the sections of the new wall. Previously, some of the old walls were 6 feet high, and they were made out of landing mats, and they were not successful in deterring illegal entry. The new walls are 30 feet high, and they stand on steel bollards. The barrier is making it tougher for illegal immigrants to sneak across, and it is helping our agents. Our agents have told us repeatedly—not for the last few months or the last couple of years but, get this, for 20 years—for 20 years, they have said we need three things: We need a barrier; we need better technology; and we need more agents and officers on the ground.

These men and women deserve our best efforts, and we should be giving them what they need. Our immigration system is full of legal loopholes and physical vulnerabilities. I applaud the President's new asylum changes, and I

urge each of my colleagues to support law enforcement's needs. They are consistent in asking for these three things—barriers, technology, and agents. This is what they need in order to help keep our Nation safe.

So as we consider how much we value our safe communities, how much we want our communities to be safe and happy and prosperous, I encourage each of us to think about these agents who are working to protect that southern border, to deal with human trafficking, to deal with sex trafficking, and to keep illegal drugs off our streets.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Ms. HARRIS. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent but, had I been present, would have voted no on roll-call vote No. 117, the confirmation of Michael H. Park, of New York, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Second Circuit. •

NOMINATIONS

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, today I wish to express my opposition to recent nominees who have come before the Senate.

First, I would like to express my opposition to the nomination of Janet Dhillon, who was confirmed to serve as Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, EEOC, by a party line vote yesterday. The EEOC has a critical mission to enforce the Federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against workers on the basis of their race, religion, national origin, or disability, and it was the first Federal agency to take the position that title VII of the Civil Rights Act protects employees from workplace discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Like many of my colleagues, I am concerned that Ms. Dhillon has refused to commit to uphold the EEOC's current interpretation of title VII as covering LGBTQ workers. I am also concerned by arguments that were made in legal briefs by the Retail Litigation Center under Ms. Dhillon's leadership, including arguments in support of policies to

make it more difficult for employers to be held liable for harassment. It is for these reasons that I would not have voted in support of Ms. Dhillon's nomination.

I also want to comment on my opposition to Cheryl Stanton's nomination to serve as Administrator of the Wage and Hour Division at the Department of Labor. Before Ms. Stanton's nomination, she served as executive director of the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce, in which capacity she garnished wages to collect unemployment insurance overpayments and had a public dispute with a staff member who refused to institute a personnel action after raising ethical objections. I voted against invoking cloture on Ms. Stanton's nomination and would have voted against her confirmation.

Finally, I want to address the nomination of Joseph Bianco for the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, which I opposed in the Judiciary Committee due to concerns regarding his record on such critical issues as privacy and civil liberties. I am also concerned that the Senate advanced Judge Bianco's nomination even though neither home State Senator returned a positive blue slip.

Thank you.

CONFIRMATION OF JANET DHILLON

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I opposed the confirmation of Janet Dhillon to Chair the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The EEOC is an independent Federal agency with an absolutely vital mission: enforcing Federal laws against employment discrimination. But Ms. Dhillon has spent her career protecting corporations that are accused of discrimination by their workers.

As a leader of the Retail Litigation Center, she advocated legal positions designed to undermine workplace protections, especially low-income women and women of color.

The Retail Litigation Center helped defend Walmart against wage discrimination claims filed by 1.6 million women who worked at Walmart. In doing so, they managed to convince the Supreme Court to raise the legal barriers for all workers to bring discrimination claims.

In a different case, this one involving racial harassment against an African-American woman, the Retail Litigation Center convinced the Supreme Court to narrow the legal definition of a supervisor. This means that workers are now less able to hold their employers accountable for workplace harassment.

Both of these were 5-4 decisions that were supported by only the Republican Justices on the Supreme Court.

All workers need an EEOC that is looking out for them, but Ms. Dhillon's nomination to Chair the EEOC is yet another way that the Trump administration keeps rigging the system for