

I say to my Republican friends, especially the leaders in the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate: Start governing in a way that is not an embarrassment to Congress and the American people.

Mr. President, please announce what we will be doing here today.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### NOMINATION OF ANN DONNELLY TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Ann Donnelly, of New York, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of New York.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11 a.m. will be equally divided for debate in the usual form.

The assistant Democratic leader.

REFUGEE CRISIS IN GREECE, NOMINATION OF GAYLE SMITH, AND UKRAINE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I had the privilege of joining Senators SHAHEN, KLOBUCHAR, and WARREN during the recess that just concluded to travel to Europe to assess the refugee flow that is spilling into Greece and ongoing Russian aggression during our visit to Ukraine.

I will start with the visit to one of our most important NATO European allies, Greece. Greece is struggling, as we all know, with its own economic challenges, but now it is facing an overwhelming flow of refugees across its border.

Almost half a million refugees have flown into Greece just this year. The bulk of the refugees come from across the Aegean Sea from Turkey. They are fleeing war and economic instability in the region. Most are from Syria, but there are many others from Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries in peril. Many are middle-class families who are simply exhausted from years of horrific war in Syria.

I met many of them and had a chance to speak to them. Their stories are heartbreaking. They are fleeing with their children and whatever they can carry. Their destination is uncertain, but they know they can't stay in the camps or in Syria. They are the victims of smugglers and exploitation. Some of these desperate people are charged 1,000 Euros just to cross a 2-mile stretch of ocean between Turkey and Greece.

We were on the island of Lesbos, and those who were able to watch "60 Minutes" this week saw a presentation of what is happening on that small island of about 80,000 people where more than 400,000 refugees have come through in the last several weeks. Many of these refugees are unaccompanied children.

At one of the camps, I met a young man who said he was 17—probably 15—who had come across that stretch of water with his 8-year-old sister. Think for a moment what that family must have gone through in deciding that it was safer for this 15-year-old to take his 8-year-old sister and try to find their way to a safe place in Europe rather than stay in war-torn Syria. That is the reality of many of these refugees and the plight that they face.

On this island of Lesbos, 2,000 refugees are arriving every single day. The Greek Coast Guard showed us stacks of discarded rubber rafts. These rubber rafts are made to hold about 20 people as they cross this 3-mile stretch of ocean. They packed them with over 50 people. They charge 1,000 Euros for each adult and 500 Euros for each child.

We saw these rafts stacked up and piles of life preservers. Some of them are the types of life preservers and jackets that you might expect, but others are ridiculous. Some of them are literally pool toys, and they say so. They have written right on them that they are not to be used as life preservers. These pool toys are strapped to those little kids who are put in these rafts that come across that stretch of ocean. There were rows upon rows of cheap outboard motors that were used to propel these rafts across the straits.

Incidentally, the smugglers picked someone in the raft and told them that they were in charge. They would ask if they knew how to operate the motor. If they didn't know how to operate it, they would show them how to use it and point them in the right direction. The refugees would then head out in the hope that they would make it across safely, and many times they didn't.

Despite Greece's economic hardship, I was impressed with how the Greek people were handling this refugee crisis. Processing registration centers had been established, and many refugees were quickly on their way to resettle in Europe.

I mentioned the 15-year-old with his 8-year-old sister. I ran into four others who spoke English, and all of them were college graduates in their 20s. One of them was a premed student who said: We just couldn't live any longer with war in Syria. We were ready to risk our lives to find a safer place.

The mayor of Lesbos has been generous and thoughtful in addressing the suffering. He told me he often thought he was handling a ticking time bomb with this refugee crisis. Instead, this island has become an example of what the rest of the world can do.

In Athens, we visited with an impressive NGO known as Praksis that is giv-

ing unaccompanied minors a safe, nurturing place to stay while they attempt to place them with families.

The United States leads the world in financial assistance for this Syrian refugee effort, but we have a moral obligation to do that and more. I have called on the administration to accept 100,000 Syrian refugees. I am a cosponsor of the emergency supplemental bill addressing refugee assistance, recently introduced by Senators GRAHAM and LEAHY.

Allow me to put the 100,000 number in perspective. Germany has agreed to accept 800,000 of these Syrian refugees. It is estimated that there are 4 million total. The United States accepted 750,000 Vietnamese refugees and over 500,000 Cuban refugees after the Castro regime took over. Those Cuban refugees included the fathers of two sitting U.S. Senators, one of whom is running for President of the United States. We accepted over 200,000 Soviet Jews who were being persecuted in that country. We have accepted refugees from Somalia and from different places around the world, such as Bosnia. We have assimilated them into America, and we can do it again.

When we go through this process of accepting refugees, we carefully check their backgrounds to make sure that they are not a threat to the United States or anybody who lives here. I think we should continue to do that, but the fact that only 1,700 have made it to our Nation in the last 4 years tells us that we need to do more.

I will continue to be a strong advocate for humanitarian safe zones in Syria so the people there can have a safe place to be treated for their illnesses and to at least live until this war comes to an end.

Let me say something else. It is embarrassing for me to stand before the Senate and note that on our Executive Calendar, which is on the desks of Senators, there includes one nominee, Gayle Smith, who has been nominated to be administrator of the United States Agency for International Development. She has been sitting on this calendar since July 29 of this year.

The USAID, which she seeks to head, is the premier frontline agency for helping refugees. Yet this good woman with a lifetime of experience is being held up in the Senate for entirely political reasons. There are no objections to her personally, and there are no objections to her background.

One Senator is holding up her nomination because the Senator stated publicly that he objects to the President's Iran nuclear agreement. Gayle Smith had nothing to do with that. The USAID had nothing to do with that. Shouldn't we appoint this good person to manage this agency to deal with this international refugee crisis?

While we are at it, they are asking that Thomas Melia of Maryland be the assistant administrator. Wouldn't we want competent management when we are talking about billions of American