

disability compensation that they are rightly due.

I hope this provision will be included in the final version, which will follow the conference committee on the national defense authorization bill. The House passed its version of the NDAA last week, and I hope the conference committee will quickly iron out the differences between the two bills so we can approve this legislation.

Like all of my colleagues, I am grateful for the dedicated service and sacrifice of millions of men and women across our country who defend our freedoms. I want to make sure, as we all do, that their transitioning to civilian life after their military service is as smooth as possible.

By improving access to healthcare, employment, and education, the Senate is working hard to support America's veterans, and we are demonstrating in a country that has an all-volunteer military that we will keep our commitments to our military members while they wear the uniform and keep our commitments to our veterans when they transition to civilian life. This is an important part of our continuing to recruit and retain the best and brightest to serve in the U.S. military.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I start this afternoon with a topic we are all talking about—the horror that we saw and heard last night at a rally when there was a chant over and over again—we have seen the footage of it—of “send her back.”

I condemn this—as I did earlier today—in the strongest possible terms, and I want to reiterate my condemnation of that chant. I know that condemnation is widely shared on both sides of the aisle. I hope folks in both Chambers and both parties will condemn and reiterate the condemnation of that kind of chant but also what is underneath it. It is racist, for sure, and it is not who we are. That is not America.

I am glad the President said that if it happens again, he will try to stop it. I wish he had done that in real time last night, but let's see what happens at the next rally.

There is no excuse for any public official to do anything other than condemn that kind of language. Representative OMAR is a Representative in the Congress of the United States who came here as a child, and for anyone to utter those kinds of words against her or anyone else, of course, should be condemned.

Fortunately, I think most Americans agree with me, and we have to be very clear when we have that kind of senti-

ment expressed, especially when it is repeated across the country, as we saw last night.

I want to talk about our asylum system, a legal asylum system that was established in the wake of the horrors of World War II. We as a Nation—the United States of America—vowed after that conflict to do better, to be better, to serve as a refuge for those fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries.

Today, families from Central America are arriving at our southern border, hoping to avail themselves of this system because of the violence in their home countries. The three we have heard so much about—Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—rank in the top 10 countries in the world for homicide—homicide. According to a report issued by Doctors Without Borders in 2017, Northern Triangle countries, these three countries, are experiencing—and this is a direct quote from the Doctors Without Borders report, 2017—“violent displacement, persecution, sexual violence, and forced repatriation akin to the conditions found in the deadliest armed conflicts in the world today.” So said Doctors Without Borders.

In the face of violence and other such circumstances, the choice to move in search of opportunity and safety is one that the vast majority of families would make, even when that journey can further subject them to violence and danger.

Late last month, the Nation was horrified—indeed, the world was horrified—by a photograph of a 2-year-old girl and her father, her small arm clinging to her father as they lay facedown in a river, dead.

That is not the picture I am showing here. We all know that picture. I don't need to show it again. So many Americans, so many people around the world remember that picture.

But the picture I put up is a picture of that little girl and her father as they lived, a picture of the two of them that appeared in the Washington Post in an article dated Thursday, June 27, 2019, on page 3.

Here is the article that the picture was taken from. The headline reads, “Pair who died at border were desperate for a better life”—desperate for a better life.

That is the story of so many of these families—desperate for a better life, free from violence or the threat of violence, free from or at least distant from death threats, and free from poverty, grinding poverty, the likes of which so many of us have never had to experience. That is what they are desperate for when they say “desperate for a better life.”

Rather than simply focus on this father and his daughter and how they died and the picture of them facedown in a river, I wanted to make sure we saw their faces, to celebrate their lives but to remind us of our obligation, our enduring obligation, to make sure that

we at least—at least—take steps to reduce the likelihood that we will ever see again a horrific picture like the one of the two of them dead in a river, facedown.

Here is what part of the story is of this little girl and her father. The little girl's name was Valeria. Quoting from the Washington Post story:

Valeria was a cheery child. Not even 2 years old, she loved to dance, play with her stuffed animals and brush her family members' hair. Her father, Oscar Alberto Martinez Ramirez, was stalwart. Nearly always working, he sold his motorcycle and borrowed money to move his family from El Salvador to the United States. Martinez and his wife, Tania Vanessa Avalos, wanted to save up for a home there. They wanted safety, opportunity.

“They wanted a better future for their girl,” Maria Estela Avalos, Vanessa's mother, told The Washington Post.

They traveled more than 1,000 miles seeking it. Once in the United States, they planned to ask for asylum, for refuge from the violence that drives many Central American migrants from their home countries every day. But the farthest the family got was an international bridge. . . . On Sunday—

This would be the Sunday before June 27.

On Sunday, they were told that the bridge was closed and that they should return Monday. Aid workers told The Post the line to get across the bridge was hundreds long.

Then we know what happened next to this father and his daughter.

There was also another story in the New York Times the day before, June 26. The headline read “Girl was Safe but Tried to Follow Father Back.”

I will not go through all of it, but here is what they were facing in terms of their own economic circumstances. At the end of the New York Times story it reads as follows:

Mr. Martinez quit his job at Papa Johns, where he had earned about \$350 a month. By then, his wife had already left her job as a cashier at a Chinese restaurant to take care of their daughter.

The couple lived with Mr. Martinez's mother in the community of Altavista, a massive housing complex of tiny concrete houses east of San Salvador, according to [someone referred to earlier in the story].

Though Altavista is under the control of gangs, the couple was not fleeing from violence, [Ms. Ramirez] told him. Rather, the grind of surviving as a family on \$10 a day had become unmanageable.

So we have a lot of families fleeing for reasons based on violence and death threats and that horror, and then we also have families fleeing because they, in this case, had \$10 a day to live on.

So these families risk danger as they cross through—what could only be said by way of understatement—treacherous terrain. They risk that danger because the graver risk is not to make that journey.

The administration has not sought, in my judgment, to address the root causes of migration, such as what we just talked about: violence, poverty, and corruption. Rather, the administration has repeatedly attempted to walk back our Nation's solemn vow

and close the door on refugees and asylum seekers.

Over the past couple of weeks, reports have surfaced of children held in squalid conditions without adequate medical attention, sanitation, or even food and water.

A law professor who spoke with children at a Texas CBP facility was quoted in the Washington Post as saying, "It's the worst conditions I have ever witnessed in several years of doing these inspections."

That is a law professor, not a casual observer but someone who has experience and training, recognizing what is happening in these facilities.

In May, the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General issued a report stating that the El Paso Del Norte Processing Center, a facility with a maximum of 125 detainees, was holding 900—capacity 125, holding 900 detainees.

Some migrants were held in standing-room-only conditions for days and weeks with limited access to showers and clean clothing. These conditions were dangerous and posed an immediate risk to both migrants and personnel.

The administration has sought to use inhumane policies like separating families, just one example, as a deterrent—as a deterrent.

They recently canceled English classes, recreational programs, and legal aid for unaccompanied minors at shelters across the country, and an attorney for the Department of Justice argued that the government should not be required to give detained migrant children toothbrushes, soap, towels, or showers.

Does that make any sense at all? Is that consistent with our values?

The administration is seeking to relax standards for holding children, when, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics—also not casual observers but a set of experts on what a child needs to survive and thrive—Department of Homeland Security facilities already do not meet the basic standards for the care of children in residential settings.

Earlier this week, the administration issued an interim final rule that essentially bars Central American migrants from claiming asylum by making them ineligible for asylum, including unaccompanied children who enter the United States at the southern border after passing through another country. This is just the latest in many attempts to restrict our asylum system and bar those fleeing violence, persecution—and for other reasons—from exercising their legal right, a legal right that is not just grounded in United States law but international law, the right to petition the U.S. Government for protection consistent with what we did after World War II because of the horrors we saw in World War II. This wasn't just some concept that was dreamed up. It was meant to deal with the horrors that World War II brought, to say to the world that we are going

to make sure that if someone is fleeing violence and persecution, they will at least have a shot to make their case, to have due process to make their case. Most don't make the case; we know that. Most end up not being successful. But we should let them make the case because we are, on our best days, a nation of laws. We are also, of course, a nation of immigrants, and both of these principles are intertwined and undergird our values.

President Kennedy said it pretty well:

Immigration policy should be generous; it should be fair; it should be flexible. With such a policy, we can turn to the world and to our own past with clean hands and a clear conscience.

It is entirely possible to create an immigration system that reflects not just President Kennedy's vision but our values as Americans—a system that respects the rule of law, that treats all individuals with human dignity, and reflects our values as a Nation.

When we think of not just what our immigration system must be about but what our asylum system must be about, let us think of those families who put their lives at risk because of what they are fleeing, who simply want to make their case.

Let's also remember two people whose faces we didn't see much of except in this one picture—a father and a daughter, little Valeria and her father, Oscar Martinez Ramirez—and remember what they were trying to do. I realize some will debate this: What happens when someone presents themselves at our border based upon poverty? I understand that will be the argument against it, but we are a big enough country and a great enough country to be able to develop a system to make sure that child and that father have a shot to come here.

One of the problems we are having now at the border is that when you tell the world that you want to push people away, by way of rhetoric or by way of extreme policies at the border—inhumane policies, which might be an understatement—and by telling the world, or at least sending the message to the world, that you want to greatly restrict immigration, you are going to have people choosing a different system to try to make their case. We need to fix both. We have a broken immigration system which this body dealt with in 2013—68 votes in the Senate—to fix the system and to deal with all the tough issues. We can't get 68 votes around here to adjourn for lunch or to move on to the next part of the day sometimes. That is only a slight exaggeration—but 68 votes.

What happened? Because there are extreme voices in this town that told the House of Representatives, "Don't even vote on it; just end it right here," the best attempt in maybe decades to secure the border, to deal with citizenship, to deal with the guest worker program, to deal with all the difficult issues with immigration, and with 68

votes here, died in the House. It didn't even get a vote in the House, and this Chamber and the House have done basically nothing since then, at least the way I see it—nothing in terms of dealing with this system, trying to fix this broken system so you have rules and order and certainty, but also based upon and founded upon our values.

Some people say: You can't do it. It is just too hard. Congress isn't equipped for that.

We are the greatest country in the world for a lot of reasons. One of them is because of our values. Another reason is when we are at our best, we tackle tough problems. Fixing this broken immigration system is a tough problem. Many Presidents and many Congresses have wrestled with it, but we got as close to getting to a fix as anytime in recent American history when that bill passed. The faster we get back to something that comprehensive, that bipartisan, and that grounded in fact and law, the better off we will be.

While we are doing that on immigration, we should have a conversation about asylum—how to do it right and how to make sure that system is working so well that it will be an example to the world.

We have a long way to go. We have work to do, but I think these difficult issues are indeed a great mission—a difficult mission, but I think they are a mission worthy of a great country.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that following leader remarks on Tuesday, July 23, the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R. 1327, as under the previous order; I further ask that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 12 noon, the Senate proceed to executive session and, if cloture has been invoked on the Esper nomination, all postcloture time be considered expired and that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action. Finally, that following the cloture vote on the Dickson nomination, the Senate resume legislative session and consideration of H.R. 1327 with all debate time considered expired at 2:30 p.m.

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