

many ways these kind of people are exactly what my "Alaskan of the Week" series of speeches is all about. So it is very appropriate we are talking about her right now.

When Cheryl was in her mid-forties, with her kids settled and in college, like a modern-day homesteader, she yearned for the next challenge. One day, she saw a group of workers doing road construction—hard, but very important work—and she thought, I can do that. Soon, she became a proud member of Alaska Laborers Local 942. That was almost 20 years ago. Her hard work, along with fellow laborers, is seen all across the State of Alaska, wind farms, trails, roads, bridges, and pipelines.

Many people talk about the great natural wonders in Alaska, and we have so many, but the manmade wonders are also remarkable—bridges, roads slicing into giant mountains, oil rigs, mines—and she and her fellow laborers have done so much to build up that part of the State.

She is a strong advocate for anybody who decides to work in the building trades, and she is particularly focused on women in the construction and building trades and recruiting them for these good jobs. She said: These are good jobs. They are good-paying jobs, and they build confidence. It is a great way to make money and to learn how to use your hands and of course to give back to your community.

To that end, she and her daughter Halle created, at their own expense, an Alaska "Women in the Trades" promotional calendar. The calendar features women of all ages who are employed as heavy equipment operators, welders, truckdrivers, tree trimmers, and on and on and on. With her own money, she put this calendar together.

She drops these calendars off at laundromats, schools, cafes, union halls, churches, and always keeps a few on hand to give to women who might need a new way of thinking about a career, who might need hope. She also gives them to people she just runs into—people like me. I was out in Fairbanks, AK, a couple weeks ago in the O'Reilly Auto Parts parking lot, and bumped into Cheryl and her daughter Halle, and I got one of these.

This calendar, Alaska Women in the Trades, is a great calendar with a couple of inspirational quotes:

Nothing is impossible. The word itself says, "I'm possible."

Get it? Pretty clever.

How about another one:

Do something today that your future self will thank you for.

Think about that, pages. It is good advice, even for Senators.

This is the kind of work she does, on her own dime, giving this kind of inspiration to her fellow Alaskans.

My team and I have gotten many emails from Cheryl's five children over the past few days, all of them talking about what a great mother she is, how giving, caring, hard-working she is,

how she is a hero to all of them, and how she is an inspiring example. Let me quote from one of the emails.

Her daughter Emmaline Hill, who, by the way, signed up for the U.S. Marine Corps when she was 18, then went on to graduate from Notre Dame, got her commission in the Marine Corps, and now is stationed in Japan as a major in the U.S. Marines—here is what she said about her mom:

My mom believes in people, especially those who have a hard time believing in themselves or don't think they are worthy of it. She is a rugged champion for the underdog and a tireless advocate for employing Alaskans and building our communities through volunteerism and action.

That is a beautiful testament to her mom from her daughter who is a major in the Marine Corps in Japan.

We are going to be going into our August work session. I am going to be back home in Alaska the whole time. We are going to be coming up on Labor Day, a very important holiday. I think it is important, when we are thinking about Labor Day, to think about people like Cheryl, her fellow laborers, and particularly the women who are doing this kind of hard work. You don't always think about that in terms of the construction and building trades, but they do great work.

So, Cheryl, thank you for all you have done. Thank you for your hard work, your inspiration, your dedication and faith, your indomitable spirit, and your example to your kids, to your fellow Alaskans, and now to Americans, as we congratulate you for being our Alaskan of the Week.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF ELIZABETH DARLING

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, in the coming hours, the Senate could take up the nomination of Elizabeth Darling to serve as Commissioner for Children, Youth, and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services. If she is confirmed to that role, she would be a key official overseeing the foster care system.

I previously had a hold on Ms. Darling's nomination, and I am going to begin my remarks by saying my hold was never about her personally or about concerns with her qualifications. In fact, I believe she is qualified for the position. I placed a hold on her nomination because of serious problems at the Department of Health and Human Services affecting child welfare policies that would fall in her area of jurisdiction if she is confirmed. I think this involves a matter the distinguished Presiding Officer of the Senate might be particularly interested in at this point.

I authored, with the former Finance Committee Chair, Senator Orrin Hatch, landmark families legislation called the Family First Prevention Services Act.

Family First, that Chairman Hatch and I authored, is a once-in-a-generation bipartisan update of child welfare

laws in America, inspired to a great extent by Marian Wright Edelman, the head of the Children's Defense Fund. The implementation of that law, in my view, is moving too slowly.

Last week, the Department of Health and Human Services followed through on a request from me and a group of colleagues from both parties and both Chambers to open up the availability of prevention programs for States that Chairman Hatch and I felt so strongly about under Family First. This was an important first step, and, if Ms. Darling is confirmed, I expect to see the Department take more.

What I would like to address for a few minutes, though, is a deeply discriminatory policy change that has been made by the Trump administration in the child welfare system. Until the Trump administration intervened, Health and Human Services regulations explicitly banned religious discrimination in federally funded Social Services programs, discrimination that should be barred by our core constitutional protections. Unfortunately, under this administration, that safeguard is no more.

This year, the Trump administration has set a precedent that foster care agencies that receive Federal dollars can turn away qualified prospective foster parents simply because they are Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Mormon, or any other faith, or simply because they are nonbelievers.

What this is all about, in short, is a green light for taxpayer-funded discrimination on the basis of religion. It stems from a case involving Miracle Hill Ministries, a foster agency in South Carolina. Miracle Hill is a faith-based social service organization—the largest provider of foster care services in South Carolina. It serves around 15 percent of the State's foster care population. I have no reason to doubt that Miracle Hill has a lot of wonderful staff and volunteers who wish to do a great deal of good work.

Last year, the Governor of South Carolina asked the Department of Health and Human Services for a waiver that would allow Miracle Hill to continue receiving taxpayer dollars despite its practice of turning away qualified foster parents based solely on their religious beliefs. In effect, it was a request for a loophole to evade the Federal policy banning religious discrimination. The Department of Health and Human Services OK'd it.

At a time—the Presiding Officer of the Senate and I have talked about this—when there are too many vulnerable kids and too few safe foster homes in America, the Trump administration actually gave the largest foster care organization in South Carolina permission to turn away prospective foster parents because of their faith.

This is not an academic matter. Let me give an example of the consequences. In 2018, Beth Lesser—a woman who unintentionally brought this issue to light—went to Miracle

Hill Ministries to volunteer as a foster mentor. Before she moved to South Carolina, she was a foster parent in Florida. You would think any foster care organization would be thrilled to have Ms. Lesser walk through their door—an experienced foster care parent coming to volunteer her time, her energy, and her love—but during orientation training, Miracle Hill found what they consider to be a problem: Ms. Lesser, like me, is Jewish. After Miracle Hill discovered Ms. Lesser's religion, they quickly turned her away.

Ms. Lesser is not the only person to experience this discrimination. Another was Aimee Madonna, who grew up in a foster care home and has three kids of her own. She contacted Miracle Hill and volunteered to open her home in the screening process. But when Miracle Hill learned that Ms. Madonna is Catholic, she got turned away too. She was devastated by the decision. In February, she sued the State of South Carolina and the Department of Health and Human Services over this unconstitutional discrimination. I commend her for fighting for her rights, and I believe she speaks for people of so many faiths whom I mentioned earlier.

I do want to explain why I find this precedent the Trump administration has set to be so objectionable, starting with the most obvious.

It is horrendous policy because it is going to hurt vulnerable kids all across this country, particularly if and when the Trump administration hands out more waivers in more States. If they do it this way, it is going to reduce the number of safe and loving foster homes available to youngsters in the child welfare system. That is the wrong way to go.

This policy is going to limit the diversity of foster homes and foster parents and growing up around people of different views and philosophies and religions. Diversity is important for kids. That is particularly important for LGBTQ youth, who make up one in five kids in foster care. There are homes where LGBTQ kids are not safe. They benefit from the chance to grow up in these more inclusive environments, where there are more diverse families who respect their sexual orientation and their gender identity.

It raises troubling questions about what is going to happen to children who were raised outside of evangelical Christianity before they entered the child welfare system. What is going to happen to a Jewish kid or a Muslim kid or a Mormon kid who is placed in a home where they are considered heretics?

This is a personal matter for me. That kid could have been me. I was so proud of my parents. They fled the Nazis in the thirties. Not all got out. All my dad—just about the most red, white, and blue fellow around—wanted to do was serve in our Army so he could drop propaganda pamphlets on the Nazis, telling them they ought to give up. You can read about my dad,

Peter Wyden, in the Holocaust Museum. I am so very, very proud of my dad.

I thought about, for example, what might have happened if my parents had died in a car crash when I was 12 years old and I had been put in one of these evangelical families through a foster agency that discriminates. I could have been told that everything my wonderful, patriotic, Jewish parents had taught me to believe was wrong; that my parents—that my dad, who was honored in the Holocaust Museum—that his beliefs were sinful. It would have added a lot more difficulty to a situation that was already traumatic.

The thought that children who have lost their parents could have another part of their identity stripped away is appalling. That religious discrimination in particular, that fundamentally un-American act—the idea that it is going to be propped up with Federal tax dollars is just wrong.

In my view, what the Trump administration has done with the South Carolina waiver is unconstitutional. I also believe it is the latest iteration of a much larger assault on individual religious liberty.

From a legal perspective, the Department of Health and Human Services justifies its discriminatory waiver by pointing to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, what is known as RFRA. Here is the problem: That law was intended to stop religious discrimination, not promote it. In this case, however, the administration is interpreting that law to protect only the religious freedom of Miracle Hill, not the freedom of Jewish or Catholic or Muslim or Buddhist individuals who want to become foster parents in South Carolina.

HHS's waiver disregards the establishment clause in the First Amendment of the Constitution, which prohibits the government from "respecting an establishment of religion." This is a Federal agency using taxpayer dollars to elevate some religions above others. That is unconstitutional every way you cut it.

The consequences at this point are limited to one State, but because of this precedent, that is one too many. It only takes one small step to set a harmful, dangerous precedent that will change everything. There are already rumors that HHS plans to turn this waiver into a nationwide policy. Make no mistake about it—that would be nationwide religious discrimination.

The consequences of an action like that would reach far beyond our child welfare system. It is not much further down the road before out-and-out discrimination against people of particular faiths, gender identities, and sexual orientations under the guise of religious freedom bleeds into other areas of American life. These debates are going to keep hitting the courts, and they are going to keep confronting the Congress. The Trump administration, Republican lawmakers, and Republican judges are ensuring that will happen.

I mentioned at the outset that this debate is tied to a nomination the Senate may take up today—we will see about later in the week. It involves the Commissioner on Children, Youth, and Families at Health and Human Services. I made that judgment, after a lot of reflection, that I am not going to stand in the way of that vote. I believe Ms. Elizabeth Darling is qualified. But in making that judgment, I was not willing to let today pass without sounding an alarm on a very dangerous precedent the Trump administration has set in this field. This is about the prospect of State-sponsored religious discrimination. In this case, it is going to come down hardest on vulnerable kids in our country. I believe it is clear that what is happening is unconstitutional.

I will close by saying again that there is bipartisan interest in improving our child welfare system. The distinguished Presiding Officer of the Senate is from Utah. I wish he could have seen Chairman Hatch and me work together on Families First. As you know, when Chairman Hatch got enthused about something, he was really enthused.

Marian Wright Edelman came to both of us. This had been her dream for 30 years, to try some fresh approaches in terms of helping these kids. In effect, what Families First does is it creates a third option. You have kids in homes where a parent might have gotten caught up in drugs or alcohol. We can get them some help. There is the foster care option. We have some very good foster care facilities in this country, and we have some that aren't exactly so great. So what Chairman Hatch and I said and what Democrats and Republicans on the Finance Committee said and what eventually the Congress on a bipartisan basis said was "We are going to do better by these vulnerable kids," and we created a third option.

One of them is built on a dream that I was part of. Back when I was director of the Gray Panthers, we were advocating for something called kinship care where grandparents could play a bigger role in stepping in and trying to help these vulnerable families, where maybe if a son had gotten in trouble with the law or a daughter-in-law had problems with alcohol and the like, the grandparent could help out.

Under Families First, Chairman Hatch, a Republican, and I, a Democrat, said: We are going to try to help those families. We are going to try to give them help. If you have a son who has had problems with alcohol and drugs, they are going to be able to get some help. The grandparents can step in and get some help. We are going to create more options for the most vulnerable families and most vulnerable youngsters in America.

We were moving forward. We were moving forward to be able to say—and this, of course, is not driven from Washington, DC; it is driven at the

State level. The Presiding Officer of the Senate is a former Governor. We were moving forward. Now we have the Trump administration seeking to move backward.

There are nearly half a million kids in foster care in this country. Democrats and Republicans ought to keep building on the work that Chairman Hatch and I—and I was proud to be his partner, with him as the chairman, in this effort to help those kids stay safe and get ahead in life. Now the Trump administration is spending taxpayer dollars not to help those kids but to promote discrimination. That is not the way to help these kids, not the way to help these families. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will join me in opposing these policies of discrimination.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT GENERAL AUNDRE PIGGEE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize a remarkable Arkansan at the end of a 38-year Army career.

LTG Aundre Piggee, who will retire in September, is the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army for Logistics. His nearly four-decade career has taken him literally all over the world, but his roots are and always have been in Arkansas.

The general was born in Stamps, AR, which is a small town in Lafayette County with fewer than 3,000 people. The son of a World War II Army veteran, the general didn't have his sights set on a career of military service from a young age. After graduating from high school, he chose to go to the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, which is about 2½ hours from home. He was a smart kid, so he received an academic scholarship to attend school.

There was no real reason for him to choose to go into the ROTC. In fact, according to him, the only reason he entered the Army ROTC was because the school allowed him to substitute it for an otherwise mandatory physical education class that would have required him to walk all the way across the campus. That seemingly mundane decision to save himself a few steps each day and maybe allow him to sleep in a few more minutes ended up being a life-changing decision for him. It set him on a path to an extraordinary career that he probably couldn't have dreamed of at the time.

Years later, the general served in jobs in Fort Hood, TX; Seoul, South Korea; Kaiserslautern, Germany; MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, and many other places. He deployed to Ku-

wait, Bosnia, and Iraq. He commanded thousands of soldiers and managed an \$11 billion Army portfolio. He led capacity-building efforts in Iraq and headed train-and-equip missions in Syria. He also directed logistics works in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia. For his exemplary service, the general earned the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star, the Distinguished Service Medal, and many other recognitions.

Throughout all of his great accomplishments and prominent positions, he has maintained a strong connection to his alma mater and his Arkansas roots.

For his work with and on behalf of his school, the current chancellor at UAPB, Laurence Alexander, said of the general:

He not only serves as a beacon of light and hope to our university and our community, but also to our state and our country. He continues to positively impact the lives of many, as well as inspiring a new generation of future military leaders.

For all of his accomplishments, the general was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame last year. Now he has decided that it is time to take off his Army uniform and pursue his next adventure with his wife, Kassi.

The general has risen to such incredible heights during his career. He is a hero in the sense of his outstanding military service, but more importantly, he is a hero in the sense that when you talk about duty, honor, country, and integrity, he is the guy who is a great example for all of us, one of the best we can find and look to. I am so proud to call him a fellow Arkansan and a friend. On behalf of all Arkansans, I wish him and his wife, Kassi, much happiness in the next chapter of their lives.

Thank you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

IOWA

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, with August just around the corner, countless Iowans are preparing to fill up their gas tanks—many with Iowa-grown E15—and take to our scenic highways for one last summer road trip. I can tell you one thing: I will be hitting the Iowa roadways myself, and I really cannot wait, folks. Throughout the month, I will be continuing on what I call my 99 County Tour, an annual tradition where I visit each and every one of Iowa's 99 counties. I will be logging hundreds of miles and speaking with thousands of Iowans.

It doesn't get any better than heading back home, getting out of this DC swamp, and talking with folks about the issues that matter most to them—like solutions to lower prescription

drug prices, policies to help our farmers and small businesses thrive, and efforts to cut wasteful spending and to make them squeal here in Washington.

So far, this year, my tour has brought me to over 50 Iowa counties, and I am aiming to visit another 30 or so before Labor Day. I will be crisscrossing the State, hosting townhalls and visiting the small businesses, farms, plants, and everyone else that are currently creating jobs and contributing to Iowa's current economic boom and record unemployment.

Meeting with and hearing from my fellow Iowans is one of the best and most important parts of my job. Our elected officials should always be out there listening to the people we work for. It is our job, and it really does make us more effective lawmakers.

For Iowans and folks across the Nation planning to hit the road this August, I hope you will take advantage of all that Iowa has to offer. With 99 counties, it means 99 unique communities for road warriors and families to visit and enjoy.

There are national treasures like the Effigy Mounds National Monument, a sacred site that is located in Allamakee and Clayton Counties, featuring more than 200 American Indian mounds. There are historic gems like the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site in Cedar County and Lewis and Clark State Park in Monona County.

I am sure folks will be willing to fill their social media feeds with one-of-a-kind Iowa attractions like the American Gothic House in Wapello County, the world's largest concrete gnome, in Story County, and the famed Field of Dreams in Dubuque County.

And who could forget the Iowa State Fair, truly the best State fair in North America and the crown jewel of Iowa attractions, with everything from the butter cow to peanut butter and jelly on a stick, hot beef sundaes, and, of course, good old-fashioned hotdogs. In fact, the Iowa State fair lists over 69 foods on a stick. That is right. It is on a stick, folks. You can try that at the fair this August.

But while you are out on the road, there are a few things that you will not be able to avoid. First and foremost, it is Democrats running for President. Folks, they are everywhere in Iowa. You will not miss them. You also can't avoid Casey's Pizza. Why would you want to? That is my question.

Now, inside the DC swamp, people may turn their nose up at gas station pizza—that is what it is, Casey's Pizza—but Iowans know it doesn't get any better than pizza from Casey's.

One more thing Iowans will not be able to avoid on the roads this August is me. So, as I am out on my 99-county tour this August, if you happen to see me at a townhall or at a local business or organization or maybe even gassing up my Harley-Davidson at Casey's or waiting in line for a slice of pizza, please be sure to stop and say hello.