

Merkley refused entry to facility holding migrants’ kids

By **ANDREW SELSKY**
Associated Press

A U.S. senator said Monday he had tried to enter a federal facility in Texas where immigrant children are being held, but police were called and he was told to leave. Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley’s attempt late Sunday to enter the facility and his request to speak to a manager came amid a national debate over the practice of separating families caught crossing the border illegally.

Merkley was accused of grandstanding by Victoria Palmer, a spokeswoman for the Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families. The agency is caring for the children being held in a former Walmart with blacked-out windows in Brownsville, a city along the Mexico border. The Department of Health and Human Services says it operates over 100 shelters in some 17 states, and that chil-

dren spend an average of 51 days in them. Merkley, a Democrat, live-streamed on Facebook his attempt to visit the facility, which is operated by a contractor. He said he and the press should be able to see conditions inside because U.S. citizens are financing it. “Every American citizen has a stake in how these children are being treated and how this policy is being enacted,” Merkley said in the video. A new policy under Pres-

ident Donald Trump is “ripping away” children from immigrant families who have entered the country illegally or are seeking asylum, he said. At another facility in McAllen, Texas, Merkley saw children in big cages, his spokesman Ray Zaccaro said. In Brownsville, a supervisor emerged from the building and said he wasn’t allowed to make any statement. He gave the senator a phone number of the public affairs office in the U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services in Washington. Meanwhile, Brownsville police arrived and asked Merkley for his name and birth date. Merkley provided the information and then tried to explain to the officer why he had come to the facility. “The children who were previously kept with their families, under a new policy just implemented by the attorney general, are being separated from their families and warehoused here,” Merkley told the police offi-

cer. “And the attorney general’s team, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement, they don’t want anyone to know about what’s going on behind these doors.” Attorney General Jeff Sessions recently announced a new “zero-tolerance policy” in which it will press criminal charges against all people crossing the border illegally, even if they have few or no previous offenses. More children are expected to be separated from their parents as a result.

FUTURE: Many paths will be taken by Pendleton graduates

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munity members, teachers, counselors and the ASPIRE staff who assisted students in securing additional scholarships. Altogether, he said with other money awarded by schools, the military and organizations across the nation, the Pendleton class of 2018 received \$1,833,174. A trio of classmates addressed the crowd and their fellow graduates — highlighting everything from their educational experiences to successes in the classroom, extracurricular activities and on athletic fields and courts. Jessie Patterson shared a memory from an assembly at the start of her freshman year. Members of the class of 2018, she said, greeted and shook hands with Greenough, where he encouraged them to stay on track with their education. “Almost 200 of us kept that promise,” she said. “We are graduating from high school.” Abigail Williams said that the road to graduation started out in grade school when “a brand new world awaited us.” It continued, she said, through the awkward stages of middle school and being “bright-eyed” freshmen to soph-



Graduating senior Denae Smith reaches out to shake Principal Dan Greenough’s hand during the Pendleton High School commencement exercises Saturday at the Round-Up Grounds.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

omores who thought they knew what they were doing to buckling down as juniors with more difficult classes and SAT exams. Their hard work and experiences, she said, will springboard them into the future. “Wherever life will take us, I think we all will go far,” Williams said. “What we make of our lives is up to us.” Hallie Porter said school may not have been easy for some of her classmates, but heading to college isn’t their only option. Many paths, she said, will be taken by her fellow graduates, including going to trade school, joining the workforce, serving in the military and settling down to start a family. Patterson said the successes of members of the class of 2018 came to fruition despite being “professional procrastinators” and “Olympic snooze button hitters.” She credited teachers, school faculty and parents for prodding them along and not giving up on them. “Despite the hardships in our lives and the obstacles we’ve faced, we’ve made it,” she said. *Contact Community Editor Tammy Malgesini at tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4539*



Mollee Allen goes back to her seat after receiving her diploma during Pendleton High School commencement exercises Saturday at the Round-Up Grounds.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney



Greg Lee and other graduating seniors listen to an introduction by Principal Dan Greenough.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney



Graduate Ryan Johnson gives Principal Dan Greenough a parting pat on the shoulder.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney



Hallie Porter processes into the Round-Up Grounds on Saturday morning for the Pendleton High School commencement exercises.

Staff photo by Kathy Aney

BAKER: Liberal justices Breyer and Kagan joined the conservative justices

Continued from 1A further elaboration” in the courts. Appeals in similar cases are pending, including one at the Supreme Court from a florist who didn’t want to provide flowers for a same-sex wedding. The disputes, Kennedy wrote, “must be resolved with tolerance, without undue disrespect to sincere religious beliefs, and without subjecting gay persons to indignities when they seek goods and services in an open market.” The same-sex couple at the heart of the case, Charlie Craig and Dave Mullins, complained to the Colorado

commission in 2012 after they visited Phillips’ Masterpiece Cakeshop in suburban Denver and the baker quickly told them he would not create a cake for their wedding celebration. They were married in Massachusetts because same-sex marriage was not yet legal in Colorado. Colorado law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and the commission concluded that Phillips’ refusal violated the law, despite Phillips’ argument that he is opposed to same-sex marriage on religious grounds. Colorado state courts upheld the determination. But when the justices

heard arguments in December, Kennedy was plainly bothered by comments by a commission member that the justice said disparaged religion. The commissioner seemed “neither tolerant nor respectful of Mr. Phillips’ religious beliefs,” Kennedy said in December. That same sentiment coursed through his opinion on Monday. “The commission’s hostility was inconsistent with the First Amendment’s guarantee that our laws be applied in a manner that is neutral toward religion,” he wrote. Liberal justices Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan joined the conservative jus-

tices in the outcome. Kagan wrote separately to emphasize the limited ruling. Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor dissented. “There is much in the court’s opinion with which I agree,” Ginsburg wrote of Kennedy’s repeated references to protecting the rights of gay people. “I strongly disagree, however, with the court’s conclusion that Craig and Mullins should lose this case.” The Trump administration intervened in the case on Phillips’ behalf, and Attorney General Jeff Sessions praised the decision. “The First Amendment prohibits governments from discrim-

inating against citizens on the basis of religious beliefs. The Supreme Court rightly concluded that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission failed to show tolerance and respect for Mr. Phillips’ religious beliefs,” Sessions said. Kristen Waggoner, the Alliance Defending Freedom senior counsel who argued Phillips’ case, said the court was right to condemn the commission’s open antagonism toward Phillips’ religious beliefs about marriage. Waggoner said Phillips is willing to sell ready-made products to anyone who enters his store. But, “he simply declines to express messages or celebrate events

that violate his deeply held beliefs,” she said. Several other legal disputes are pending over wedding services, similar to the Phillips case. In addition to florists, video producers and graphic artists are among business owners who say they oppose same-sex marriage on religious grounds and don’t want to participate in same-sex weddings. Barronelle Stutzman, a florist in Richland, Washington, has appealed a state Supreme Court ruling that found she violated state law for refusing to provide the wedding flowers for two men who were about to be married.