



SURPRISE ENCOUNTER. In this July 3, 2017 photo provided by Jolene Jackinsky, former U.S. President Barack Obama holds Jackinsky’s six-month-old baby girl while posing for a selfie with the pair at a waiting area at Anchorage International Airport, in Anchorage, Alaska. Jackinsky said Obama walked up to her and asked, “Who is this pretty girl?” (Jolene Jackinsky via AP)

‘Oh my god, it is Obama’: Alaska mom, baby meet ex-president

By Jennifer Sinco Kelleher
The Associated Press

An Alaska mother is cherishing cellphone photos she snapped of her wide-eyed six-month-old baby in the arms of former President Barack Obama.

Jolene Jackinsky was at Anchorage International Airport looking for an airline when she ended up in a waiting area for private flights where a man she thought looked like Obama was sitting.

“As I got closer, I thought: Oh my god, it is Obama,” she recalled from Newhalen, a small Alaska village where she’s vacationing.

Obama then walked up to her and asked, “Who is this pretty girl?”

They chatted about how fast children

grow while Obama carried baby Giselle. Jackinsky took a few photos of a smiling Obama carrying Giselle, who was wearing a straw hat with a white ribbon.

Obama told them he was headed home from a vacation, Jackinsky said.

When Giselle’s father approached, Obama joked, “I’m taking your baby,” Jackinsky said.

Giselle was calm and content during the brief encounter, Jackinsky said. “It was only five minutes, but it was a moment that will last forever,” she said.

She posted the photos on Facebook.

“I think it’s unreal and pretty exciting that I get to have a picture with him and my baby,” she said. “Not a lot of people get to meet him.”

Associated Press writer Rachel D’Oro in Anchorage, Alaska, contributed to this report.

Afghan girls allowed into U.S. for robotics contest

By Jill Colvin
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials will allow a group of Afghan girls into the country to participate in an international robotics competition after President Donald Trump intervened, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders confirmed, ending a saga that had sparked international backlash.

Homeland Security Department spokesman David Lapan said U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services approved a State Department request for six girls from the war-torn country to be allowed in, along with their chaperone, so they can participate in the competition. The girls’ applications for U.S. visas had been denied twice.

The nonprofit organizing the competition celebrated the reversal in a jubilant statement.

“I truly believe our greatest power is the power to convene nations, to bring people together in the pursuit of a common goal, and prove that our similarities greatly outweigh our differences,” said Joe Sestak, the president of First Global. He credited “the professional leadership of the U.S. State Department” for ensuring that all 163 teams from 157 countries, including a team of Syrian refugees, would be able to participate.

The U.S. State Department had declined to comment on why the Afghan team’s visa applications were denied, saying that “all visa applications are adjudicated on a case-by-case basis in accordance with U.S. law.”

A senior administration official said Trump raised the issue with his national security adviser, H.R. General McMaster, during his trip to Germany for the Group of 20 summit, and had asked for additional options. The State Department and Department of Homeland Security came up with several — with the idea of “paroling” the girls through the Department of Homeland Security ultimately chosen by the National Security Council. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private deliberations.

Parole is a temporary status in which a person who is otherwise ineligible to enter the country is allowed in temporarily because of an emergency or humanitarian purpose, or because it’s deemed to be in the public good.

Without the reversal, which was first reported by Politico, the girls would have had to watch via video link



ENTRY ALLOWED. Teenagers from the Afghanistan Robotic House, a private training institute, practice at the Better Idea Organization center, in Herat, Afghanistan. Six female students from war-torn Afghanistan have been allowed to participate in an international robotics competition in Washington, D.C. Of 162 teams participating, the Afghan girls were the only nation’s team to be denied visas. First Global, a not-for-profit charity, holds the annual international robotics challenge in hopes of sparking a passion for science and technology among high school students around the world. (AP Photos/Ahmad Seir)

from their hometown in western Afghanistan.

The girls wanted to show the world that Afghans could also construct a handmade robot and they had been deeply disappointed by the initial rejections.

“When we heard that we were rejected, we lost hope,” said 14-year-old Sumaya Farooqi. “We applied again for the U.S. visa and we were rejected again.”

Farooqi and her teammates faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles to even get to a point where they could seek permission to attend. It took them six months to prepare, often working seven days a week, as they constructed a robot that sorts balls, has the ability to

Hoary bats confirmed on Kahoolawe Island

WAILUKU, Hawai’i (AP) — After years of speculation, wildlife officials have confirmed the presence of an endangered bat subspecies on Kahoolawe Island, seven miles southwest of Maui.

The Kahoolawe Island Reserve Commission used eight detectors to confirm the presence of the Hawaiian hoary bat on the remote island. Natural resource specialist James Bruch told *Maui News* that the bat may be the only native land mammal visiting and possibly living on the island, which was formerly a Navy target.

The detectors picked up the first bat in June 2016. It detected a bat again in August and again in September and October, before dropping in December and January. There were no detections again until April, the report said.



ENDANGERED BAT. In this May 11, 2007 file photo provided by Three Ring Ranch Exotic Animal Sanctuary, a Hawaiian hoary bat is seen being fed in Kailua-Kona, Hawai’i. Wildlife experts rescued and nursed back to health the endangered bat after it was found lying lifeless, dehydrated, and starving on a car. (AP Photo/Three Ring Ranch Exotic Animal Sanctuary via West Hawaii Today, File)

Before this, Bruch said Hawaiian hoary bat sightings were reported, but could not be confirmed.

“Every once in a while either a worker or volunteer would say, ‘Oh, I think I saw a bat,’ but no one could verify it,” Bruch said. “We’ve put out a detector one or two nights out of the year and nothing was ever picked up.”

The bat is small in size and dark in color, making it difficult to spot. It has been seen on Maui, Hawai’i, Molokai, and Oahu but is suspected to live only on the Big Island, Maui, and Kauai, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife website.

Data suggests the bats travel to Kahoolawe and then return to their homes by nightfall, Bruch said. He thinks it might be possible that a small population has taken residence and the bats may be using the island for breeding.

The commission is continuing to review the bat data and is hoping to acquire funding for more research.

“It’s amazing how little we know about the species,” Bruch said. “They’re cryptic. They’re harder to detect, but the technology is much better and the prices are coming down to where it’s more reasonable to do studies like this.”

recognize orange and blue colors, and can move objects to put them in their correct places.

The girls travelled from their homes in Herat after convincing family members to let them go — no small feat in a country where young girls are often discouraged from pursuing academic study, especially in hard sciences such as math.

They made the 500-mile journey to the U.S. embassy in Kabul twice because their applications were denied the first time, even though that location was targeted by a deadly truck bomb on May 31 in which more than 150 people were killed and more than 400 others wounded.

War-torn Afghanistan has faced a series of large-scale attacks as the Taliban stepped up its war against the Kabul government in this year’s summer offensive. In addition, the emerging Islamic State group affiliate in Afghanistan has tried to increase its footprint with attacks in urban areas.

Afghanistan is not part of Trump’s order to temporarily ban travel from six Muslim-majority countries. Teams from Syria, Iran, and Sudan — which are on that list — were granted visas to compete. Members of the team from Gambia were also granted visas after initially being denied.

First Global, a not-for-profit charity, holds the annual international robotics challenge in hopes of sparking a passion for science and technology among high school students around the world. It is an “Olympics”-style competition in which one team from every nation is invited to participate. It started July 16 and ends July 18 in Washington, D.C.

Associated Press writer Josh Lederman contributed to this report.

Give blood.

To schedule a blood donation call 1-800-GIVE-LIFE or visit HelpSaveALife.org.

TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA

■ Polo

Polo’s “Talking Story” column will return soon.