

Remarks to Class on Tuesday, 31 January

As-salaam alaikum!

I'm going to do something I've never done before in 43 years of teaching at the UW, which is read a statement, rather than talk extemporaneously, to my class about current events. I'm doing so because I know that college students often think they are too busy to pay any attention to the news or to politics (you are not; you simply might have other priorities), and because I believe that it behooves the US Citizens among you, no matter what your political beliefs or how you voted in the previous election, to know what is going on so that you can form informed opinions and act accordingly, and for the international students or those among you who are not citizens, you need to know precisely what is going on in order to be able to defend yourselves against possible arbitrary and illegal actions of the US government, as well as knowing where to seek help, solace, and friendship from your American hosts.

As a native-born American, who has never had to worry about getting into or out of this country, and has only been detailed briefly, once, by customs, back in the days when they inspected people's luggage regularly, I probably cannot imagine what it is like to be prevented from entering the country where you have worked for years, where you have raised your family, where your best friends and loved ones reside, or where you have just come recently to study or work, and heretofore been welcomed warmly by people of many different races, religions, origins, and walks of life.

Now because of the executive order signed by President Trump on Saturday, many people originally or currently from Libya, Sudan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Yemen, and Somalia, are prohibited from entering the US, and all refugees from Syria are banned indefinitely. It has been noticed that the Trump Organization, the parent company of Trump's wealth, has no investments in any of those countries, while other Muslim-majority countries where Trump does have investments, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan, are not included in the banning order. Exceptions can be made for members of minority religions: the order does not state that this refers explicitly to Christians, but both President Trump and former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani have confirmed that this is true, and that this order is their current method of implementing a ban on Muslims entering the country, without saying explicitly that Muslims are banned. There have been contradictory statements from the White House over whether green card holders (entitled to permanent residence) are also barred; some have in fact been barred. Since Saturday, hundreds of people with valid US visas have been kept from boarding flights to the US; some were detained at airports on arrival, or sent back across the ocean shortly after landing, often separating them from their families.

Many courageous people have spoken and acted against this ban. Lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union and other organizations, and even members of both houses of Congress, went to airports Saturday and Sunday, to try to contact people detained there and obtain their release, some were ultimately successful and some not. Five lawsuits were brought against the order, and four federal judges, in Brooklyn, Boston, Seattle, and issued temporary injunctions against portions of the order. People made signs and flooded airports where people were being held, and held marches and

demonstrations in cities all over the country protesting this ban. Legal experts have affirmed that it violates the first and fifth amendments to the US constitution. Because you may have paid less attention in high school civics classes than you now wish you had, or because you may have attended high school in another country, I will explain how.

- 1st Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” By favoring Christians over Muslims, the order violates this amendment
- 5th Amendment: “nor [shall any person] be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law” By depriving people of the liberty to enter and live in the country, which is granted by their visa and particularly by their green card if they have one, the order violates this amendment.
- 14th Amendment: nor shall any State...deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. By giving unequal protection of the laws to different classes of persons, the order violates the 14th amendment. [Note that “person within its jurisdiction” applies equally to citizens and non-citizens.

As a long-term resident of the State of Washington (though I was born and raised in California), I am proud that Mr. Bob Ferguson, Attorney General of the State of Washington, has filed suit in the US district court for the Western District of Washington, seeking to void the order not just for this state but for the entire country, based on its violation of the US Constitution.

The Acting Attorney General of the United States, Ms. Sally Yates, sent a letter to the President yesterday afternoon, stating that she was ordering the attorneys in the Justice Department not to enforce the order or defend it against suits brought seeking to overturn it, on the grounds that it was illegal and probably unconstitutional. About three hours after her letter was received, President Trump fired her, and appointed Mr. Dana Boerte as Acting Attorney General. Mr. Boerte has stated that he will enforce the order.

We also know that President Trump fired Daniel Ragsdale, the head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, but as of now we don't know why.

There is a history lesson here as well as a civics lesson. In late 1973, President Richard Nixon's administration was embroiled in the complex web of scandals known as Watergate, and after Nixon's first Attorney General, John Mitchell, was indicted for obstruction of justice and resigned his position, Nixon had appointed Elliot Richardson as Attorney General, and Richardson had accepted the post on the condition that he could appoint a special prosecutor to investigate possible crimes connected to Watergate. Richardson appointed a lawyer named Archibald Cox as special prosecutor. On October 20, fearing that Cox was acquiring too much information about himself and his close associates, and with Cox threatening to subpoena Nixon to testify, Nixon ordered Richardson to fire Cox. Richardson refused and resigned in protest, meaning that the Deputy Attorney General, William French Smith, who still lives in Medina and is over 84 years old, became acting Attorney General. Nixon ordered him to fire Cox, and he also refused, so Nixon fired Smith. The third ranking person in the Justice Department

was Robert Bork, the Solicitor General, and Bork agreed to fire Cox. This series of events became known as the Saturday Night Massacre; news organizations are now using the term Monday Night Massacre to refer to last night's events.

Many people have spoken out against President Trump's order in various places and for various reasons. Iraq and Iran have already retaliated by announcing they will deny entry to almost all US citizens, apparently in the case of Iraq that includes US military personnel fighting with the Iraqi army against the Islamic State. Retired US generals have stated their opinion that this order directly hampers the ability of the US military to carry out its missions. Evangelical Christian leaders have spoken out strongly against the discrimination in the order, even though it implicitly favors Christians over Muslims. In the US Senate, Democrat Diane Feinstein of California has introduced two bills, which as legislation would overrule Trump's executive order. One voids the order itself, and the other prevents any President from issuing discriminatory immigration orders.

The State of Washington, the City of Seattle, and the UW all have current policies that in no uncertain terms protect the rights of people to stay here; this includes not just people with valid visas but also undocumented guests. There are also many resources at the UW that you can use if you think you have a reason to be afraid you will be a victim of this or other discriminatory policies, or even if you are just worried for your family or friends. I've listed these on the next slide.

Also, I want to end on a personal note before we get back to environmental anthropology. On Sunday, I heard a sermon by Rev. Jon M. Luopa of the University Unitarian Church, a man I greatly admire for his intellect and moral clarity. He was, like so many of us, extremely upset, and preached a real spellbinder, in which he quoted a poem by the Jesuit Father Daniel Berrigan, which spoke of "The firestorm of hope." Hope is what gets us going. As another American poet, Emily Dickinson said, "Hope is the thing with feathers/that perches in the soul/and sings the song without the words/and never stops at all." Hope is what makes me an environmental anthropologist: if there were no hope for the environment, why study it? Nobody will care that you documented its ruin. If there were no hope for the country, I wouldn't be giving you a history lesson and words of encouragement. Despair is the greatest danger, whether it's for our society, for our Republic, or for our Planet.