

## LETTERS

### Look At Our History With Refugees

Nov. 22, 2015

Editor, The News-Gazette:

From 1959 to 1980 the United States has accepted more than 750,000 refugees from Fidel Castro's Communist Cuba.

What we see now in the present xenophobic rhetoric we hear from politicians and citizens alike is just patently UnAmerican. How so? Just look at our refugee/immigration history. If we use American history as a judgment standard, these virulent voices either reflect lack of knowledge of American history or harbor the use of misinformation for ulterior motives.

You would assume that if one has a point to make on this issue, that factual historical information would guide their pronouncements. With the instant availability of historical information offered by the Internet, one can't hide in the shadow of political demagogues and prejudicial fear-mongers.

Several sources give a factual review of our history in this matter. See <http://www.migrationpolicy.org> or "Refugee Policies" at <http://www.americanforeignrelations.com>.

Here are the facts. The United States has continually offered asylum to refugees from strife-torn countries ruled or soon to be ruled by the most nefarious of dictators or governments which viciously oppose us. In my lifetime I have seen refugees gladly accepted from Communist Cuba, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Vietnam, Poland, and several other Communist countries. Just remember that at the time Communism had threatened to "bury us." For 40 years of my life we were engaged in a "cold war" with these communists under the threat of nuclear annihilation looming large. That didn't close our doors to the victims of those regimes. More recently when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in the 1990s we accepted close to 2,000 Afghan refugees annually. It seems ironic that we so easily accepted 750,000 refugees escaping the tyranny of Communist Cuba and balk at accepting 10,000 Syrians escaping ISIS.

However, evidence is not always used in the political discourse leading to our decisions. There's often a reliance upon the utterances of our founding fathers to offer guidance in winning hearts and minds. Therefore, I shall mention:

"This new World hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. Hither have they fled, not from the tender embraces of the mother, but from the cruelty of the monster... as if the Almighty graciously meant to open a sanctuary to the persecuted in future years, when home should afford neither friendship nor safety." Thus spoke Thomas Paine in "Common Sense."

JOHN ANFIN  
Lexington

### Look To Lady Liberty, And The Roanoke Star

Nov. 23, 2015

Editor, The News-Gazette:

Recent comments by Roanoke Mayor David Bowers suggesting that Syrian refugees not be allowed in to the U.S. caused me some concern. But no more than all of those letters of protest sent by other public officials. But when Mayor Bowers suggested that Syrian refugees be placed in camps similar to Japanese internment camps during World War II, I felt compelled to speak out.

Such statements by a public figure are not only hateful but they are bigoted, ill-informed and outright wrong. If he professes to be a leader of the Star City then perhaps he should take his lead from the Lexington City Council and Council member Patrick Rhamsey who last week circulated a statement amongst the members of the Council expressing opposition to those clamoring for a ban. The statement says that "As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, we recognize and celebrate that this nation was founded by immigrants, many of whom were also refugees fleeing oppression and violence. We declare it our patriotic duty as Americans to welcome refugees, from Syria or otherwise, with open arms into our community, commit to assist them in whatever manner we are able, and encourage our fellow citizens to do likewise."

Being a student of history, I am reminded of a passage from a manifesto written by another man in history who said "Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." Adolf Hitler wrote this in his autobiographical manifesto "Mein Kampf." He was convinced that his divine power compelled him to destroy the Jewish race.

America, the land of my immigrant Quaker ancestors (including second cousin William Penn), has always welcomed those seeking freedom from religious persecution. In New York stands the Statue of Liberty which incidentally enough was a gift from France. The flame held high by Lady Liberty reminds me of the Star of Roanoke whose bright light shines over its people. Both bright lights are meant to guide, protect and invite those in need to our country and community. As quoted from the Statue of Liberty Poem (Emma Lazarus' sonnet, New Colossus):

"A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles."

I applaud the members of the Lexington City Council for their statement of welcome and condemn the mayor of Roanoke for not being more open and welcoming. The answers that he seeks can be found in the Roanoke Star and in the diverse people that live in his community. My hope is that he opens his heart to those in need and feels the glow of the star in front of him and embraces all of the people that he was elected to represent and not just a select few. Happy Thanksgiving!

LORNA SMITH  
Rockbridge County

### Revenge And Hate Just Bring Us More

Nov. 23, 2015

Editor, The News-Gazette:

As we grieve for the Paris attack victims, consider the effectiveness of US responses to Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. We felt fear, anger and pain. Three thousand civilians were killed.

Security efforts were beefed up. Several known plots have been thwarted with security precautions, vigilant intelligence, detective work and luck. Vulnerability continues. It seemed logical to attack the host of Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. President Bush convinced congress to invade Iraq, claiming Saddam Hussein was part of 9/11 attack and possessed WMDs. Over 4,000 coalition soldiers died in Iraq. Over 3,500 NATO troops died in Afghanistan. More were permanently injured, which may include readers of this letter. Estimates of the total deaths in Iraq War range from 150,000 to 1 million. None were involved in the 9/11 attacks. In Iraq and Afghanistan, destroying the governing authority was quick. Without a path to create legitimate authority, civil war has since been continuous. Is it possible that innocent victims of these conflicts experienced anger and the desire to support revenge? The power vacuum created by the Iraq War and the Syrian civil war created opportunity for the "so called" Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Consider U.S. trends since the Paris attacks. Over half of U.S. governors seek to block Syrian refugees in their states. When Jews were fleeing the Holocaust, would we have sent them back if among them were some Nazi spies? Religious persecution is facilitated by blocking humanitarian support for the victims. Presidential candidate Trump has expressed support for a national registry for Moslems. Is this similar Jews being required to wear the star of David during Nazi rule?

Responses to violence must be motivated by the need to protect ourselves, build opportunities for peaceful co-existence and yes, love for thy enemy. Revenge and hate just brings us more. The attacks on civilians in Paris were indeed disturbing, giving rise to fear. We shouldn't overestimate the threat. The number of terrorist and their victims is tiny compared to the victims of war. In 2014, the U.S. had 37,000 traffic fatalities. Yet, we go back to our cars without fear because in a country of 300 million the odds are that we will not become one. As we consider how to respond the Paris hate crimes, please pray that love is part of our response.

ELI FISHPAW  
Rockbridge County

### Muslim Refugees Favored Over Mid-East Christians

Nov. 23, 2015

Editor, The News-Gazette:

Television recently pictured Obama overcome by a serious attack of umbrage ("Obamaspeak") occasioned by the suggestion that Syrian Christian refugees be accorded an admission preference over Syrian Muslim refugees.

Obama objected to the concept of a religious preference per se, but his animus against Christians, especially those "riding their high horses," was clearly displayed by the prospect of a preference over Islamists. This is hardly surprising given the favored treatment that has regularly been accorded Muslim immigrants vis-a-vis Mid-East Christians.

So obsessed was Obama that he failed to mention that U.S. policy does take into ac-

KEITH E. PUTBRESE  
Natural Bridge

### ACA Made RAHC Expansion Possible

Nov. 23, 2015

Editor, The News-Gazette:

Congratulations to the Rockbridge Area Health Center on its recent new federal expansion grant of \$1 million. There is great need for affordable health and dental care in our community. Credit should be given to Suzanne Sheridan and the center's excellent staff.

This grant, however, would not have been possible without the passage of the Affordable Care Act (aka - to many - the unpopular Obamacare). A little noticed part of the ACA provided funding for new community health centers and expansion of existing centers. Thanks to the ACA we will have better access to health care in our community. We will also have a higher quality of care, and the additional dollars will guarantee more jobs in our community.

The ACA is not just about insurance... it is also about access to affordable and quality health care.

CHRISTINE CAPITO BURCH  
Steeles Tavern

## REMEMBER TO RECYCLE

### Serious Gaps Remain In Refugee Screening Process

Nov. 23, 2015

Editor, The News-Gazette:

In October the Obama administration announced its desire to raise the refugee ceiling to 85,000 for fiscal year 2016, with a minimum of 10,000 from Syria. Secretary of State Kerry would like to expand the program to 100,000 in 2017, and Hillary Clinton fully supports the administrations ambitions in this regard.

The Syrian refugee relocation program poses serious challenges. Recently FBI Director James Comey testified to the House Judiciary Committee that even with a decade of intelligence and forensic evidence available to us in Iraq, the US still admitted Iraqi nationals who were terrorist threats.

Comey also made it very clear that serious gaps remain in the screening process for refugees particularly those coming from Syria. In addition, he has made it publicly known that the FBI currently has active investigations in over 1,000 ISIS-affiliated individuals spread throughout every state. In support of Director Comey's assertions, officials within the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the agency responsible for processing the refugee applications, have admitted that the government of Syria does not have any databases that the U.S. can access to run security checks.

Given this information and other testimony from officials, after the Paris attacks one would at least expect a pause in the Syrian program especially with one of the terrorists posing as a refugee. On the contrary, President Obama is adamantly pushing ahead with his plan to bring Syrians to our shores. Less than 24 hours before the attacks, he confidently proclaimed that ISIS is "contained" and now asks the American people to trust his better judgment while trashing anyone who disagrees with him.

The United States has the most generous refugee policies in the world. We can continue this tradition as well as keep our citizens safe by providing substantial aid and assistance in the formation of "safe zones" for the Syrians within the transcontinental region of the Middle East. We are now witnessing the heavy toll of a politically correct war. Under this administration the generational tendencies of ISIS have been allowed to fester and grow and will continue to do so if left unchecked.

MICHAEL BARRY-REC  
Lexington

### Interested In Solar Power For Your Home?

Nov. 16, 2015

Editor, The News-Gazette:

More than 40 Rockbridge residents gathered in early November to hear Aaron Stuch, a representative of VA SUN describe photovoltaic (PV) panels that generate electricity when exposed to sun.

He also described the PV system components that allow connection to the utility power grid (BARC, Dominion, etc.), the factors affecting the number of PV panels in a system, and the buying and installing of systems on the properties of about 30 home and business owners among us who have agreed to consider purchasing a system.

With a 25-to-30-year lifespan of the PV panels, the system will pay for itself in eight to 12 years (an 8-to-12-percent yield as an investment) when a federal 30 percent tax credit, scheduled to terminate at the end of 2016, is applied. Discussion among the attendees revealed that choice of PV electricity generation to lower their family CO2 footprint was as important as lowering the cost of home electricity. Participating homes will remain connected to BARC or Dominion, but when sunshine makes electricity not used in the home, their meter will run backwards, effectively "selling" electricity back to their power company.

VA SUN has helped form a PV-electric cooperative in Augusta County over the past year that has resulted in over 60 existing home installations of PV systems in that county. The purpose of the cooperative forming here in Rockbridge is to help members understand the details of PV systems, to make informed decisions for planning their home system, to collectively determine the best system installer for all of the coops installations and to take advantage of bulk purchasing.

So what do you need to join? Participation is free and without obligation: the member decision to buy a PV system is based on having a serviceable roof (not needing repair or replacement within 15 years) with good solar orientation, and a means of affording (or financing) the approximate \$10,000 upfront cost for a small system (for homes with \$60 to \$90 monthly bills). Visiting the VA SUN website will answer many questions. Bob Biersack at 463-1942 and Chris Wise at 261-1909, the organizers of the Rockbridge cooperative, can sign you up for email updates about future meetings.

If you and your family want to do something about global warming, that is business-wise at the same time, start at VA SUN and sign up.

FRED FEVRIER  
Rockbridge Baths

Your Business  
**GETS ATTENTION**  
In The Classifieds