

T-N should get all the facts first

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In a Times-News editorial (Sunday, July 3), the headline admonished “Get the facts before reacting,” referring to my comments on hearing that St. James Episcopal Church is exploring the possibility of hosting Middle Eastern refugees in Hendersonville.

I had said in a television interview that I was concerned that St. James' activities could open the door for Syrian refugees to be housed here.

The editorial did not tell the whole story, and it failed to support the conclusion it insinuated — that those speaking against what St. James is considering have a “witch-hunt mentality.” That’s untrue, and I applaud those in our community who are speaking out on this matter. Opinions I’ve received through social media, phone calls and in person are thoughtful and heartfelt.

Perhaps an article about “getting the facts before making a decision on bringing Middle Eastern refugees here” might be in order.

- **Fact 1:** Mayor Barbara Volk indicated our concerns were “overblown” because it would take a long time for St. James’ plan to come to fruition. But that doesn’t mean a plan isn’t going forward.

Overcoming the one hindrance cited — Hendersonville’s distance from an approved resettlement office — is exactly what is being considered. In a June 23 email, Mayor Volk said: “... They (St. James) are applying, through the Episcopal Church, to be a refugee resettlement agency.”

- **Fact 2:** There is good reason to believe that the refugees St. James would host would be Syrian.

Among print materials Mayor Volk received from St. James were two articles specifically referring to Syrian refugees: “Syrian Refugees Don’t Pose a Serious Security Threat,” published by the Cato Institute, and “Myths and Facts: Resettling Syrian Refugees,” from the U.S. Department of State.

- **Fact 3:** Notwithstanding those two articles, there is serious concern that Syrian refugees cannot be properly vetted.

On Nov. 17, 2015, the Washington Post reported in part:

“FBI Director James Comey (said) in congressional testimony last month that ‘a number of people who were of serious concern’ slipped through the screening of Iraq War refugees ‘There’s no doubt that was the product of a less than excellent vetting,’ ” he said.

“Although Comey said the process has since ‘improved dramatically,’ Syrian refugees will be even harder to check because, unlike in Iraq, U.S. soldiers have not been on the ground collecting information on the local population. ‘If we don’t know much about somebody, there won’t be anything in our data,’ he said. ‘I can’t sit here and offer anybody an absolute assurance that there’s no risk associated with this.’ ”

- **Fact 4:** Not being able to properly vet refugees increases the risk of bringing in potential terrorists.

It is reported that in the past fiscal year, 1,682 Syrian refugees were admitted to the U.S., and roughly 23 percent were adult males (U.S. Department of State: “Myths and Facts: Resettling Syrian Refugees”). That may seem like a low percentage, but applying it to President Barack Obama’s goal of admitting 10,000 this fiscal year, we’d be admitting 2,300 men.

- **Fact 5:** It is unlikely that bringing refugees here is the best means of helping them.

In “The High Cost of Resettling Middle Eastern Refugees” (November 2015), the Center for Immigration Studies stated that resettlement in the United States for one Middle Eastern refugee costs American taxpayers an estimated \$64,370 over the first five years, 12 times the U.N. estimate for caring for one refugee in a neighboring Middle Eastern country.

Dr. Steven Camarota, the center’s director of research and lead author of the report, commented, “Given limited funds, the high cost of resettling refugees in the United States means that providing for them in neighboring countries in the Middle East is more cost-effective, allowing us to help more people.”

- **Fact 6:** In today’s environment, with people understandably concerned with matters of security, the question should be asked: Is helping refugees more important than helping with the needs of our community, i.e., homeless children, fallout from domestic violence, adequate/affordable housing, meaningful employment, to name just a few?

The refugees’ plight is terrible, but there are real hardships here just as worthy of concern. No doubt the people at St. James are honestly seeking to help with a serious problem, but I don’t believe it is witch-hunting to suggest that there may be safer and more cost-effective ways to apply our time and treasure.