

THE EMPORIA GAZETTE

Headlong retreat from morality

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One number illustrates how seriously the Trump administration violates our nation's most basic moral principles. That figure is 11, the number of Syrian refugees admitted to this country in 2018. Only 44 have arrived since the beginning of the fiscal year last October.

The president has expressed strong support for the victims of Bashar al-Assad's murderous regime in Damascus — "Another humanitarian disaster," he tweeted after a recent chemical attack. But in an act of mean-spirited, wrong-headed hypocrisy, Trump has slammed the door shut on the victims of countless "humanitarian disasters" in Syria and around the world.

Under Trump, the annual quota for admitting refugees to the United States has been slashed to 45,000, down from 110,000 under Barack Obama and half the historic average on 90,000. But as of mid-April, only 11,245 refugees had arrived since the start of the current fiscal year, according to the Refugee Council USA. At that rate, it translates to an annual total of barely 20,000, less than half of Trump's already truncated target.

"At a time of widespread need, the United States is in headlong retreat from the principles and practices that for so long has made it a global beacon," David Milliband, president of the International Rescue Committee, wrote in the Washington Post. "It is no exaggeration to say that if current trends continue, the U.S. government will have no refugee resettlement program at the end of this administration."

Trump's repeated attempts to block immigration from mainly Muslim countries have been thwarted by a series of federal judges, and one of those cases, brought by the state of Hawaii, reached the Supreme Court this week.

But when it comes to refugees — displaced persons seeking asylum for political reasons — Trump has more discretion. His trampling of human decency has been ruthlessly efficient, and Syria is only one example. Through the first four months of the fiscal year, only 81 Iraqi refugees gained entry to the U.S., compared to 4,700 in the previous year.

"During the worst refugee crisis in world history, the United States is failing in its very limited commitment to admit refugees," concludes the Refugee Council.

The Trump administration makes two arguments for its restrictive policy: Refugees endanger American security, and they drain public resources. Both are blatantly false.

On security: The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, says violence committed by refugees is virtually nonexistent and estimates that the chance of an American dying in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee is 1 in 3.64 billion. "Refugees are victims of terrorism, not terrorists," says Milliband.

On economics: Last year, the White House commissioned a report from its own Department of Health and Human Services, trying to document the cost of refugee resettlement. When the report contradicted the president's prejudices — it showed that refugees contribute a net benefit of \$63 billion to the economy over 10 years — the White House spiked the document, according to The New York Times.

New American Economy, a pro-immigration alliance of mayors and business leaders, examined the record of refugees who have arrived since 1975. Its report, issued last year, "demonstrates the strong, long-term upward economic trajectory experienced by many refugee families, and gives evidence that, rather than drain their communities, the high rate of labor force participation of refugees and their spirit of entrepreneurship instead sustains and strengthens their new hometowns."

While refugees do receive some public assistance when they first arrive, they quickly become taxpaying Americans whose median household income eventually reaches \$67,000, \$14,000 more than the median income of U.S. households overall. That's why John Feinblatt, chairman of New American Economy, asserts, "Refugees more than pay their way."

Trump's hostility toward refugees is not just based on false assumptions and "alternative facts;" it's a profoundly immoral policy that tarnishes America's reputation in the eyes of the world. "We need to show our friends and allies that we stand with them and this is a shared burden," Michael Chertoff, secretary of homeland security under President Bush 43, told the New York Times.

According the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 65.6 million people have been displaced from their homes worldwide; 22.5 million are refugees, and more than half of those are children under 18. Twenty more people are uprooted every minute — more than 28,000 every day.

In the face of "the worst refugee crisis in world history," this president hardens his heart and turns his back. Instead of sharing the burden, he is shoving it away. History will not forget or forgive him.