Letters to the Editors

Charles Uphaus

May 17, 2018

Virtual refugee ban is 'most shameful'

Of all the repellant actions taken by the Trump administration — the trashing of environmental standards, the filling of the Cabinet with ethically challenged plutocrats, the attacks on the courts, the Justice Department, the State Department, and the EPA — one of the most egregious is the near total shutdown of refugee admissions.

While this administration has gone the extra mile to demonstrate its incompetence in a wide range of areas, from the Travel Ban to fiscal policy, with respect to refugees it has proven itself both competent and malevolent.

In a recent story in The Star, Rebecca Sprague, of Church World Service in Harrisonburg (the refugee settlement agency for this area), noted there are lots of churches in and around Winchester that would like to sponsor families. "The roadblock is really just politics."

According to David Miliband, of the International Rescue Committee, in an April 16 Washington Post op-ed:

Since the modern U.S. resettlement program was established in 1980, an average of 95,000 refugees per year have been allowed to come and settle in the United States. This from a global refugee and asylum-seeker population that has now swelled to more than 25 million ... But President Trump has decreed that the number of refugees to be admitted in fiscal 2018 should be 45,000 — half the historic average. Worse, it is now clear that his administration is rigging the admissions system to ensure that only around 20,000 are allowed to come here in that period. Indeed, more Syrians were killed in the suspected chemical weapon attack on April 7 — at least 60 — than have been admitted to the United States as refugees in the six months since the fiscal year began.

This in the face of the worst refugee crisis in modern history.

Of course this hostility to foreigners is not without precedent in U.S. history. One could point to the "Know-Nothing" political movement of the 1840s and '50s, which sought to prohibit the entry of foreigners — particularly Irish Catholics — into the country. It ought to be clear what a political, cultural, and economic disaster for this country the Irish turned out not to be.

As for the risk, the conservative Cato Institute has calculated the likelihood of an American dying in a terrorist attack by a refugee as infinitesimal. And on the economic side, other studies

have found that, over the past decade, refugees have brought in $63 billion more in government revenue than they cost. By the time refugees have been in the country at least 25 years their median household income is higher than the overall U.S. median.

So why, in the face of all this, does the Trump administration so adamantly and maliciously reject admitting refugees? The answer is simple: The president is playing to the totally unfounded nativist fears of his political base.

History is going to record this as one of the more shameful episodes of our history.

Charles Uphaus

Frederick County