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OUR VIEW

Two truths and a lie

TOPIC: Syrian refugees

The political debate du jour regards the United States’ policy toward Syrian refugees fleeing their country — which has been split apart by civil war and partially overtaken by ISIS — and are seeking asylum wherever they can find it.

In a bipartisan measure, the House of Representatives voted to tighten and lengthen the screening process for Syrian refugees. That bill heads to the Republican-controlled Senate where it may have the votes to pass.

Let’s try to get past understandable feelings of fear to the facts as best we know them.

TRUTH: The U.S. is set to welcome 70,000 refugees this fiscal year.

The National Conference of State Legislatures recently put together a handy document entitled “The U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program: A primer for policymakers” where much of this information is gleaned from.

The primer explains the Refugee Act of 1980, which was created primarily to deal with the flood of refugees from Russia and Southeast Asia at that time.

“It created a partnership with state government and nonprofit agencies to provide cash, medical and social services until refugees became self-sufficient in their new communities,” reads the NCSL literature.

Under the agreement, Congress and the president set a maximum number of refugees the U.S. will accept each year. Currently, that number is 70,000, but plans are to increase it to 100,000 by 2017. The U.S. resettles more refugees than any other country in the world. However, it is estimated that more than 60 million people worldwide are displaced from their homes because of war or persecution each year — meaning less than 1 percent of refugees are resettled abroad.

Since 2012, 1,854 Syrian refugees have resettled in the United States. President Obama wants to bring 10,000 Syrian refugees to the U.S. this fiscal year.

TRUTH: The process for becoming a refugee in America is long and difficult.

A majority of candidates are first referred to the U.S. by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, an organization that reviews applications from around the world, registers individuals and selects the most vulnerable who will be unable to return home. Often they are women head of households, as well as victims of torture and violence.

That’s when the Department of Homeland Security takes over. They conduct criminal and medical background checks well before the refugee sets foot in America. On average, this work takes 18 months to complete. According to the NCSL, “refugees are subjected to the highest level of security check of any traveler to the United States.”

This includes multiple interviews with the refugee family. Any person can be barred on medical grounds, criminal background, national security reasons, or “potential to become a public charge.” No person can be admitted if they have contributed money, intelligence or any support to a terrorist organization, if they have been members of a terrorist organization. Other crimes that would refuse entry: prostitution, acts of religious violence, money laundering, as well as drug or human trafficking.

LIE: Syrian refugees were among the terrorists who killed hundreds of civilians in Paris.

Initial reporting in the bloody aftermath of the Paris attacks included information about a Syrian passport, found on one of the attackers, that was previously registered at a border crossing. The person holding it had formally applied for asylum.

However, days later the Agence France-Presse reported that “all indications point towards the fact that he was a soldier loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.” The source noted the passport was either stolen or fabricated.

“We should not mix the different categories of people coming to Europe. The one responsible for the attacks in Paris ... he is a criminal and not a refugee and not an asylum seeker,” said Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

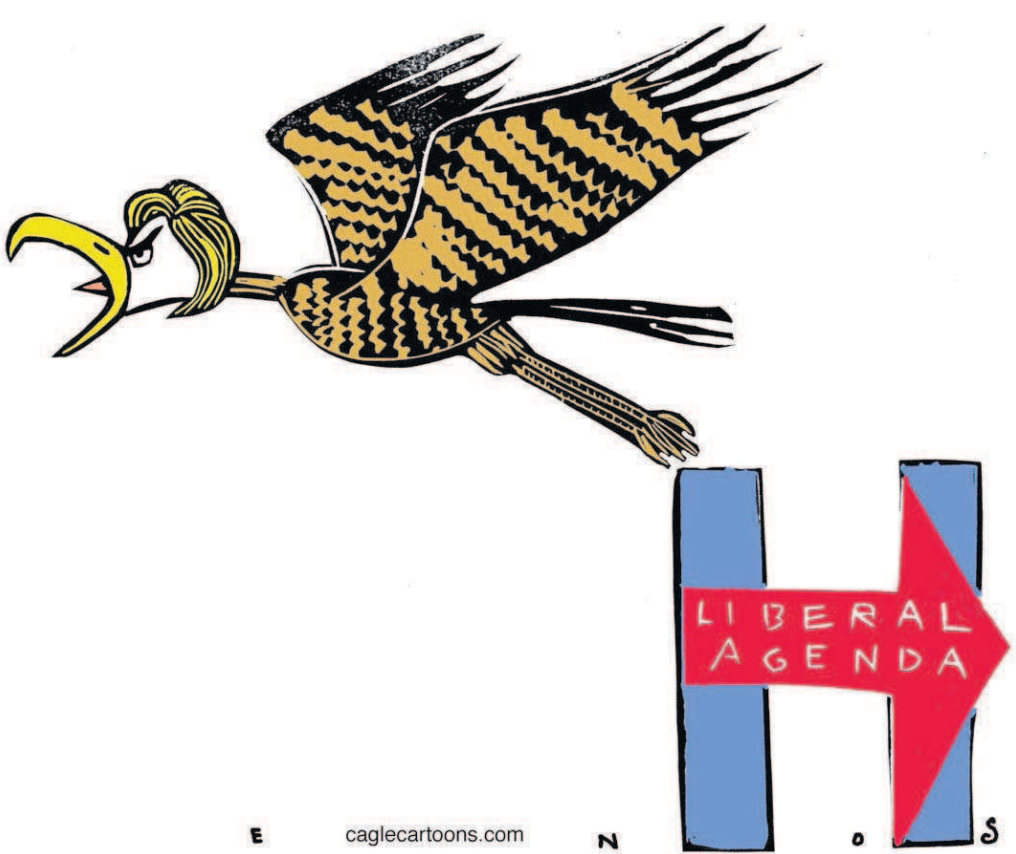
Thomas de Maiziere, the German interior minister, said the passport may be a “false trail” placed deliberately by the Islamic State attackers to turn public opinion against Syrian refugees.

Yet the ties to the conflict in Syria are clear. The two French and two Belgian nationals are documented to have trained and fought with ISIS in Syria last year, according to numerous reports. Investigators believe they used the same routes and transportation that many refugees have used to reach Europe.

French President François Hollande said this week the attack will have no bearing on the number of Syrian refugees that France will resettle.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

Give us your opinion on the Syrian refugee issue at www.eastoregonian.com



OTHER VIEWS

Tales of the super survivors

The age of terror is an age of shocks. Individuals, families and whole societies get torn apart by unexpected stabbings, shootings and bombings.

It’s horrible, of course, but over the past few years the findings of academic research into the effects of these traumas have shifted in a more positive direction. Human beings are more resilient than we’d earlier thought. Many people bounce back from hard knocks and experience surges of post-traumatic growth.

In the first place, post-traumatic stress disorder rates are lower than many of us imagine. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about 13 percent of the first responders on 9/11 had symptoms that would qualify as a stress disorder. Only about 13 percent of the people who saw the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in person experienced PTSD in the next six months. The best general rule for all of society seems to be that at least 75 percent of the people who experience a life-threatening or violent event emerge without a stress disorder.

Even many of those who are unlucky enough to fall victim to the horrific pain of PTSD are able to recover and rebuild better lives. These are people you sometimes meet who have experienced the worst in life but still radiate love and joy. They get to live a second life and correct the mistakes they made before the earthquake shook everything loose.

As Philip A. Fisher, a University of Oregon psychology professor, noted in an email, the big background factor that nurtures resilience is unconditional love. The people who survive and rebound from trauma frequently had an early caregiver who pumped unshakable love into them, and that built a rock of inner security they could stand on for the rest of their lives.

There are some foreground factors, too, traits super survivors tend to have that enable them to come back stronger than ever. These people are often deluded in good ways about their own abilities, but completely realistic about their situations. That is to say, they have positive illusions about their own talents, and an optimist’s faith in their own abilities to control the future. But they have no illusions about the world around them. They accept what they have lost quickly. They see problems clearly. They work hard. Work is the reliable cure for sorrow.

Recovering from trauma is mainly an exercise in storytelling. As Richard Tedeschi, a psychology professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, has pointed out, trauma is a shock that ruptures the central

story that you thought was your life. The recurring patterns that make up life are disrupted. The sense of safety is lost. Having faced death, people in these circumstances are forced to confront the elemental questions of life.

But some people are able to write a new story. As Tedeschi writes, post-traumatic growth comes not from the event but from the struggle afterward to write a new story that imagines a life better than before. Researchers have found that people who thrive after a shock are able to tell clear, forward-looking stories about themselves, while those who don’t thrive get stuck ruminating darkly about the past.

Book 1 is life before the event. Book 2 is the event that shattered the old story. But Book 3 is reintegration, a reframing new story that incorporates what happened and then points to a more virtuous and meaningful life than the one before.

These are intensely moral narratives that describe a life of higher purpose. Viktor Frankl survived the Holocaust and concluded that those who could best survive the camps were those who could satisfy their hunger for lives of meaning. Even if they were suffering, they could direct their attention toward those they loved and those they would serve in their future lives.

Frankl, who went on to become a professor of neurology and psychiatry, cited Nietzsche’s dictum that he who has a why to live for can endure almost any how. The stories super survivors tell have two big themes: optimism and altruism.

It’s interesting that this age of terrorism calls forth certain practical skills — the ability to tell stories, the ability to philosophize and define a meaning to your life. Just as individuals need moral stories if they are going to recover, so probably do nations. France will most likely need a parable to make sense of what happened, just as the United States still has competing parables about the meaning of 9/11.

This is why foreign policies that pursue amoral realpolitik are always impractical. If a country can’t discern a moral purpose in its foreign policy, it will lack resilience. It will lack the capacity to bounce back from an attack. It will lack a satisfying narrative and lose the ability to thrive in terror’s wake.

The good news is there is no reason to be pessimistic during the war on terrorism. Individuals and societies are tough and resilient, and usually emerge from attacks better than before.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

OTHER VIEWS

Utility fee is one way Pendleton can upgrade its streets

We have been talking about the urgency of road repair for more than a year and one thing is clear: Talk will not fix our streets. As one citizen offered in testimony on the matter, “We need to land this plane.” A street fee will deliver nearly half a million dollars in much needed repairs every year — more than doubling the current level of spending on streets.

Let’s take a look back: Starting more than a year ago, many concerned citizens stepped forward to say the city must make more repairs to neighborhood streets. Some homeowners argued that they were promised a fix 20 years ago and are still waiting. These calls for action prompted scrutiny of how much the city spends on road repair and what it would cost to improve all of our streets to at least a “good” status. The numbers were staggering.

It has been estimated that between \$17-31 million is needed



JANE HILL
Comment

to repair all of the streets in Pendleton to good condition. That amounts to \$1.7-\$3.1 million per year over the next ten years.

At the Nov. 17 city council meeting, the \$5 street fee was up for a vote to pay for repairs. You might be thinking, “Wasn’t this already decided?” or “Can I be sure this will go toward roads?” Because of these and other public concerns, a number of us voted to pull the issue from the agenda to make sure citizens have more information before we vote on it. The issue will be considered at the Dec. 15 meeting.

How much will a street fee generate per year?

The fee is expected to generate approximately \$481,000 per year.

Where will the money go?

The \$481,000 would go to a fund dedicated for street repair. Streets in the worst condition would receive 30 percent of the dollars (about \$144,000 per year). Approximately \$336,000 (70

percent annually) would be spent on maintaining roads that are in decent condition to keep them from deteriorating and becoming more expensive to maintain.

Why can’t we just use a marijuana tax?

Currently, there are no marijuana dispensaries in Pendleton. The council will take up this issue at the Dec. 1 meeting. State law requires a local marijuana tax of up to 3 percent be referred to voters before it can be enacted. Pendleton voters would have to approve a local tax on the November 2016 ballot. If passed, it is unlikely that any revenue would be generated until 2017.

Who will pay it?

The street fee would be paid by water users. There are 5,991 water meters in the city and 5,175 of us use a 3/4 inch meter. That means most homeowners would pay \$5 per month.

The fee would be graduated based on size of water meter so entities that use bigger water meters would pay more than the average homeowner. The

remaining fees are as follows: 1 inch meter, \$8.50 (\$67 in town); 1.5 inch meter, \$16.50 (105 in town); 2 inch meter, \$26.50 (79 in town); 3 inch meter, \$53.50 (26 in town); 4 inch meter, \$83.50 (28 in town) and a 6 inch meter, \$166.50 (11 in town). Large hotels and the prison are examples of facilities with 6 inch meters.

Is there relief available for those who would experience a serious hardship?

For a small number of homeowners, a \$5 monthly fee may be an undue burden. We should explore solutions that would allow these homeowners to apply for relief.

Who proposed the street fee?

The street fee was recommended in June by a Capitol Improvement Committee made up of citizens and councilors.

Currently, 29 cities across the state charge street fees to fund road repair. The fees range from \$1.53 a month in Corvallis to \$11.56 in Oregon City.

How do I know the city won’t spend the street fee on something else?

The ordinance states “all street fees shall be placed in the street fund and shall be used exclusively for road maintenance activities.” That means it cannot be used for any other expenses like inter-fund loans. There is a list and a map of the streets that would be repaired on the city of Pendleton website.

Thank you to the community members who have come forward to demand a solution to the street problem. Now let’s get to work.

Jane Hill is an at-large Pendleton city councilor.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a phone number. Send letters to 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.