

Dear Representative Scott,

Greetings! I hope this note finds you in well. The Spokane Interfaith Council heard your call for a special session of the Legislature to “draft emergency legislation to address the refugee crisis” and declaration that Muslim refugees constitute an “invasion of our country.”

Knowing your commitment to our country and our extended community in the Inland Northwest, I want to invite you to our “Meet the Neighbors” event the evening of January 20th, 2016 at the Spokane Islamic Center. This event is designed to provide community leaders accurate and respectful information about the people they serve and live alongside, as well as highlight the rich history of our area’s religious communities. And what a rich history to share!

There are about 5,000 American Muslims in the Inland Northwest (some who live and contribute to the community in your district) who, inspired by their faith, give back to society every single day. Muslims here are Americans in their hearts and in fact – most are born or raised as U.S. citizens. Spokane area public school teachers like Mona Ali are engaging and inspiring the next generation of Americans. Law enforcement officials like Assistant U.S. Attorney Aine Ahmed are working to keeping us all safe. Right here in Spokane County, we have active duty military personnel, U.S. military veterans like Eman Karns (USAF veteran), nurses providing compassionate care, pharmacists like Eihab Ahmed, business people like Dina Mujanovic, and other American Muslims in the many other roles building our nation’s vibrant economy.

They are upstanding citizens and exemplify the best of America. Like millions of American Muslims nationwide, they share the same American values and freedoms that we all cherish, knowing that we are all in this together, and they participate actively in mainstream society, and I look forward to introducing many more of them to you during your visit.

You’ll meet my friend Admir and his wife Azra, who’s a lecturer at a local college. They’re Americans. They are U.S. citizens. They believe in America. They pay their taxes, and as registered voters, they make sure to vote every election. Azra is a working mom, who along with her husband works full-time job to put food on the table for their family. You’ll also meet their 2-year-old daughter Najla. She just started talking and Admir and Azra are working hard to build a better future for their daughter. Like all parents, they want her to grow up to be a productive citizen, and a proud American. American Muslims want to succeed in the traditional American way – by working hard and supporting their families.

You’ll also meet my friend Ayesha. Born in Alaska, she has spent the past many years as a military wife. Her loving husband is a recent U.S. Air Force veteran, stationed at Fairchild Air Force Base. Inspired by her Islamic faith, Ayesha volunteers hours of her time giving back to society. She especially enjoys volunteering her time with the Spokane Interfaith Council bringing together people of all faiths around our shared identity as Americans. American Muslims believe in the right and freedom of all U.S. citizens to live and worship in their own way, and they deserve to practice their faith in return.

You’ll also meet my friend Mona, who grew up in Post Falls and is a public school teacher in Spokane schools. She told me that inspired by her Islamic faith, she has made it her mission in life to give back to

society as a public school teacher, where she is engaging and inspiring the next generation of Americans. She is one of thousands of American Muslim public school teachers who, inspired by Islamic teachings of giving back to society, are engaging and inspiring the next generation of Americans nationwide.

You'll also meet my friend Aine, a former active duty U.S. Army combat veteran, who, as part of his service to our nation, was deployed on at least two tours to combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan. After leaving active duty service, Aine still practices every day the Islamic lessons his parents taught him of serving God by serving mankind. That is why he now serves as an Assistant U.S. Attorney and had of the criminal division in that office. You'll quickly gather from his accent that he grew up on North Carolina and so he's 'Southern by God's grace!'

They are upstanding citizens and exemplify the best of America. Like millions of American Muslims nationwide, they share the same American values and freedoms that we all cherish, knowing that we are all in this together, and they participate actively in mainstream society, and I look forward to introducing many more of them to you during your visit.

Then, is my hope that fair-minded leaders like you will stand up and affirm American values of religious freedom, publicly and vocally convey the stories of the lives and contributions of the American Muslims you get to know, and join us in reminding our fellow Americans that we are, and always will be, Americans, united as one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. I am blessed to be surrounded by wonderful friends of many faiths here in the Spokane and Northern Idaho area.

I would love to make your visit a reality, so I personally pay for your travel and hotel accommodations. I'd like to also take you to dinner with my friends before the event. I can't wait to introduce them to you when you're here. Please have your staff reach out so we might meet in January. Already, we have had Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich as well as staff from Congresswoman Cathy McMorris-Rodgers RSVP. I'd love you to be apart of building bridges of trust and understanding in the Inland Northwest.

Blessings,

R. Skyler Oberst

President, Spokane Interfaith Council