

Idaho legislator and former refugee says Idaho has role to play in resettlement process

Rep. Hy Kloc, D-Boise

I was born in a Displaced Persons Camp in Essen, Germany, at end of World War II. My father Sam, my mother Libby, and my brother Jack were Holocaust survivors. Most of our extended family were not so fortunate. Poland, our home for generations, was a bitter memory defiled by death and destruction. My parents, my brother, and I lived in that camp for three years awaiting permission to travel to America.

We were not alone. Tens of millions of people were displaced in the wake of the war. Those who couldn't leave Europe faced food shortages, disease, and the prospect of having to rebuild their lives from nothing.

For us, like so many refugees, America was more than a place. It was the promise of a new life. My parents never forgot being on the deck of the ship that brought us to America and seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time. Nor did they ever forget their feelings of gratitude to this country that had offered them a home when they had none.

Today, the world faces a refugee crisis even greater than that seen after World War II. Families are fleeing unimaginable horrors, risking everything to reach the safety of the European community. And every day that we delay in arriving at a solution to this humanitarian crisis, innocent lives are lost.

America must play a role. Yet in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks, there are those who say we can't afford to take a chance. We must halt the flow of refugees to the United States. Let other countries shoulder the burden. We are not willing to run the risk of even one terrorist setting foot on our soil.

Let us not forget that in 1939, fear of Nazi infiltrators prompted the United States to turn away the steamship *St. Louis* with almost 1,000 Jewish refugees on board. They were returned to Europe, where about a quarter of them perished in Nazi death camps. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, fear of saboteurs led to the interment of thousands of Japanese Americans, and yet many Japanese Americans served valiantly in our armed forces.

Today, we look upon both of these actions as casting a shadow of shame on our nation. And if we don't learn from our mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them.

Every day online, over the airwaves, and in the press, we are confronted with the plight of Syrian refugees. When I see these images, I am reminded of my family and the other families on board that ship that sailed into New York Harbor on a cold winter day more than six decades ago under the watchful eye of the Statue of Liberty.

America is a beacon of hope to the world. We must not allow fear to rule our judgment and make a mockery of everything we hold most dear.

What can you do? Refuse to be silent. Contact your state legislators, your congressmen, and our governor. Tell them that you support the promise that makes America great. And remind them of those cherished words inscribed on that icon of freedom in New York Harbor:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

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