

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 17, 2015

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Nebraska Avenue Center
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretaries Johnson and Kerry,

We write regarding the need to ensure that, as the United States considers increasing the number of Syrian refugees allowed into the country, we maintain rigorous security vetting of all applicants. While the United States is a compassionate country and has a role to play in alleviating the suffering of people caught up in this tragedy, we must strike a balance that does not ever sacrifice the safety of our citizens.

Our country has a proud history of accepting some of the world's most vulnerable refugees. Each year, the United States aims to ensure at least half of all refugees referred by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are considered for resettlement in the United States. In 2013, more than two-thirds of UNHCR-referred refugees were resettled in the United States.

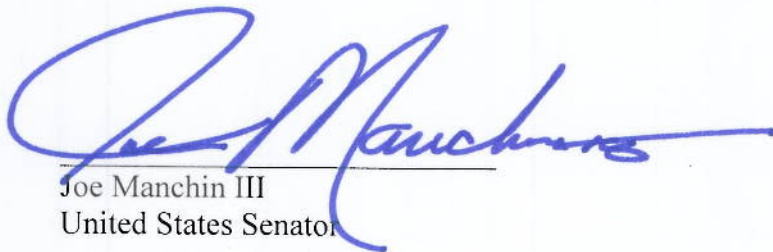
With over 4 million refugees and 7.6 million internally displaced people, the crisis in Syria is the largest refugee problem in a generation. While the United States should continue its tradition of helping those fearing persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, we must be aware that terrorist organizations like ISIL will try and take advantage of the situation. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper recently said "we don't obviously put it past the likes of ISIL to infiltrate operatives among these refugees."

The Administration recently announced its intention of taking in at least 10,000 Syrian refugees over the next year. While we support United States efforts in providing assistance to refugees, under no circumstances should your agencies sacrifice the thoroughness of the security vetting process in order to admit a certain number of refugees. For example, refugees currently undergo biographic and biometric checks that are run against the Terrorist Screening Database and files from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Department of Defense, Interpol, and other agencies. We also understand that the Department of Homeland

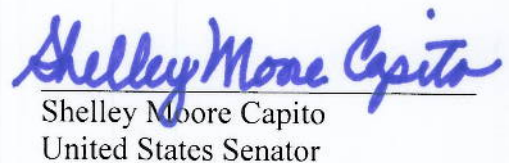
Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is reviewing all Syrian refugee cases prior to any interviews in order to identify potential national security concerns and that officers adjudicating cases with Syrian applicants are receiving Syria-specific training. The current vetting process often requires 18-24 months of review before a refugee is even able to set foot on U.S. soil. These are prudent measures which should absolutely not be cut short in an effort to try and accommodate more refugees than the process can safely handle.

As a nation founded by immigrants, the United States should continue to play a leading role in addressing the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict in Syria. As you consider accepting additional Syrian refugees, we ask for your commitment in maintaining the current rigorous security protocols and ask for a detailed plan of how you will specifically address the threat of infiltration by terrorist groups like ISIL.

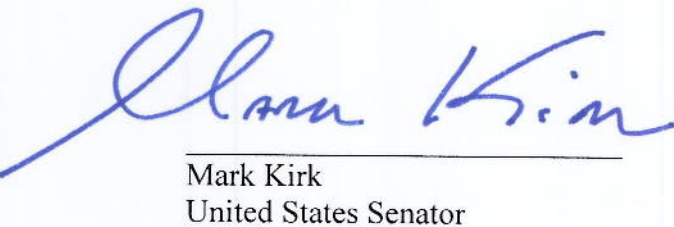
Sincerely,



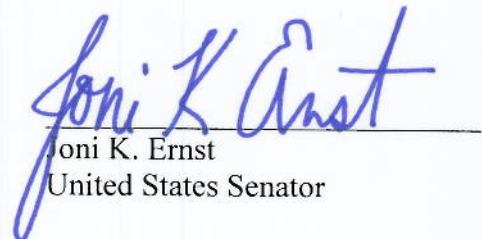
Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



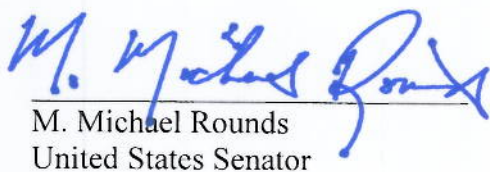
Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



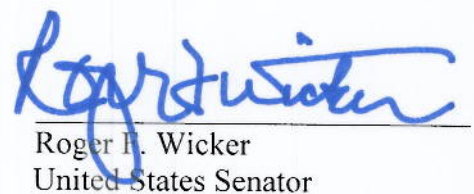
Mark Kirk
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Roger Wicker
United States Senator