

Good morning, my name is Gabby Weiss and I am from Palmer, Alaska. I have come here today to explain the importance of House Joint Resolution No. 30 and to urge all the committee members to help make this resolution a reality.

First off, a brief recap of the magnitude of the refugee crisis and refugees in general. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a refugee is defined as “a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.” That is all a refugee is. Just from the definition, it is known that the term refugee means a person, someone who is as human as you and me, who is fleeing their country because it isn’t safe. I think that sometimes we people get caught up on the labels. Because we are referring to the people who are fleeing from violence as this new population, the “refugees,” there is this barrier that is put up that makes us humans feel like we are somehow very different from each other.

It very intangible for us to grasp what refugees are going through because right now, we are inside, dry and warm, fed and watered, safe and sound, but there are men, women, and children, who are fleeing from war, persecution, or natural disaster...right now. And it isn’t like it is just hundreds of people, or thousand of people, and it’s not even just a million people. No, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, it is 22.5 million people, women, men and children, fleeing for their safety. That means that if you take the population of Alaska and multiply it by 30, that number is still less than all the refugees in the world. And guess how many of that number of refugees are children. Is it a 10th, a 5th or a 3rd? No! More than one half of those 22.5 million people are children, under the age of 18. They didn’t **choose** to be born into an unsafe area.

That is a huge number of people facing adversity and trauma, but even though you can’t help everyone, you can still make a difference! If the United States uses its leadership to start encouraging other countries to take in refugees, as well as tries to prevent and help out in the events that create refugees, imagine how many lives you could improve.

Also, the United States can benefit from taking in refugees itself. In fact, the National Bureau of Economic Research explains, an adult refugee will generally pay 21,000 dollars more in taxes than they will receive in benefits in their first 20 years in the United States.

A thought stopping Americans from welcoming refugees is the idea that refugees may be terrorists. However, a terrorist would not chose to come to the US through the refugee resettling process. The accepting process of refugees includes in depth vetting and according to the US Department of State, it can take up to 24 months. In addition, as of 2015, expert Kathleen Newland from the Migration Policy Institute said, “The United States has resettled 784,000 refugees since September 11, 2001. In those 14 years, exactly three resettled refugees have been arrested for planning terrorist activities—and it is worth noting two were not planning an attack in the United States and the plans of the third were barely credible.”

The last reason why we should help is because these people, these refugees, need our help. The refugee crisis has created horrible situations for all refugees. Families become split apart and lives get put on hold. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are 3.5 million refugee children who should be in school, but aren’t. Also, rates sometimes as high as 86% project post traumatic stress

disorder in refugees according to the US Department of Veterans Affairs. Lastly, according to the Mercy Corps Organization, one half of Syria's population before the war, that is 11 million plus people, have been killed or forced to abandon their homes due to the Syrian conflict.

Because we are the lucky ones who get to have meetings, and eat lunch, and read the newspaper, and spend time with our friends and families, we need to take it upon ourselves to care and support the other humans who aren't as lucky as us. This is so important to me because if I was fleeing for my safety, I would want someone to help me. To conclude, I am asking all the committee members to please vote for House Joint Resolution No. 30. Thank you so much for your time.