

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**HOUSE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 13, 2018

8:02 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Justin Parish, Co-Chair  
Representative Harriet Drummond  
Representative John Lincoln  
Representative Dan Saddler  
Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins (alternate)

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative George Rauscher  
Representative David Talerico  
Representative DeLena Johnson (alternate)

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE BILL NO. 264

"An Act relating to a fee for disposable shopping bags; relating to the sale of reusable shopping bags; relating to the recycling of disposable shopping bags; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 30

Urging the United States Congress to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to promote the safety, health, and well-being of refugees and displaced persons; urging the United States government to uphold its international leadership role in responding to displacement crises with humanitarian assistance and to work with the international community and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to find solutions to conflicts and protect refugees; and urging the President of the United States to continue to mitigate the burden placed on frontline refugee host countries.

- HEARD & HELD

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: HB 264

SHORT TITLE: SHOPPING BAG FEES & RECYCLING

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) JOSEPHSON

01/08/18 (H) PREFILE RELEASED 1/8/18  
01/16/18 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/16/18 (H) CRA, L&C  
01/30/18 (H) CRA AT 3:00 PM BARNES 124  
01/30/18 (H) -- MEETING CANCELED --  
02/10/18 (H) CRA AT 10:00 AM BARNES 124  
02/10/18 (H) Heard & Held  
02/10/18 (H) MINUTE(CRA)  
02/13/18 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

BILL: HJR 30

SHORT TITLE: URGE U.S. SUPPORT OF REFUGEES

SPONSOR (s) : REPRESENTATIVE (s) JOSEPHSON

01/24/18 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS  
01/24/18 (H) CRA, STA  
02/13/18 (H) CRA AT 8:00 AM BARNES 124

#### **WITNESS REGISTER**

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HB 264.

LISA DELANEY, Staff

Representative Andy Josephson

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Answered questions during the hearing on HB 264, on behalf of Representative Josephson, prime sponsor.

PATRICIA CUE

Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 264.

DAVID NEES, Research Associate

Alaska Policy Forum

Anchorage, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 264.

ANNEMIEKE POWERS

Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 264.

KARLA HART

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 264.

SUSIE HAYES, Volunteer

Valley Community for Recycling Solutions;

Member

Mat-Su Zero Waste Committee and Plastic Bag Committee

Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 264.

JAMES SQUYERS

Rural Deltana, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HB 264.

WILLIAM HARRINGTON

Spenard, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HB 264.

MICHELLE PUTZ, Member

Bags for Change

Sitka, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HB 264.

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Alaska State Legislature

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** As prime sponsor, presented HJR 30.

GABBY WEISS

Homer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in support of HJR 30.

NICHOLAS STEEN

Wasilla, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified in opposition to HJR 30

ROBERT FAWCETT

Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HJR 30.

CHARLES DUNCAN

Take, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HJR 30.

MELISSA KEMBERLING

Palmer, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Testified during the hearing on HJR 30.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[8:02:04 AM](#)

**CO-CHAIR JUSTIN PARISH** called the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Representatives Drummond, Lincoln, Kreiss-Tomkins (alternate), and Parish were present at the call to order. Representative Saddler arrived as the meeting was in progress.

**HB 264-SHOPPING BAG FEES & RECYCLING**

[8:03:10 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 264, "An Act relating to a fee for disposable shopping bags; relating to the sale of reusable shopping bags; relating to the recycling of disposable shopping bags; and providing for an effective date."

[8:03:32 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HB 264. He announced his staff would offer answers to questions asked at the last hearing of HB 264, on 2/10/18. He remarked that the research into the questions brought to light that there were more communities seeking to ban plastic bags than he had thought there were. He said he believes a ban may be "the preferred route." He said he asked Legislative Legal and Research Services how far out the effective date could be, because a delayed effective date may give communities more chance to prepare. He indicated that he has not yet received an answer.

[8:05:44 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS restated a question he had asked on 2/10/18, which is whether plastic bags present more of a problem than other forms of plastic or Styrofoam trash.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON deferred to Ms. Delaney.

[8:06:33 AM](#)

LISA DELANEY, Staff, Representative Andy Josephson, Alaska State Legislature, on behalf of Representative Josephson, prime sponsor of HB 264, said she has not been able to find statistics specific to Alaska but is still seeking an answer for Representative Kreiss-Tomkins.

REPRESENTATIVE KREISS-TOMKINS said the question is important to his understanding the impetus of HB 264. He said he sees Styrofoam as a greater problem in Southeast Alaska. He said he is interested in solving "the greatest harm."

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON pointed to the handout in the committee packet of answers that Ms. Delaney had compiled, and he said [plastic bags] are second, after fishing gear, as attractants to fish and birds.

[8:08:43 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH return to public testimony, [which had remained open after commencing on 2/10/18].

[8:09:29 AM](#)

PATRICIA CUE testified in support of HB 264. She offered the following information from the Environmental Working Group regarding plastic bags: Americans use more than 100 billion bags per year; use per person is more than 300 annually; average length of use is 12 minutes; the expectancy of each bag is up to 1,000 years; during the 2011 International Coastal Cleanup, volunteers collected 120,450 pounds of bags in the United States; in the ocean bags break down into small, plankton-size particles and can outnumber plankton 6:1, and the particles collect toxins at levels up to 1 million times the level found in sea water; marine wildlife often mistake plastic bags for food, especially sea turtles hunting jellyfish; parts of plastic bags have been found blocking the breathing passages and stomachs of whales, dolphins, seals, puffins, and turtles; 85 percent of all sea turtles will be injured or killed by plastic, including endangered leatherback turtles that summer in Massachusetts Bay; and 80 percent of marine debris comes from land-based waste - there are five "garbage patches" [gyres] in the Pacific Ocean.

MS. CUE relayed that retail businesses spend more than \$4 billion annually to provide plastic bags. She said at the time the information was published by the Environmental Working Group, nearly 100 cities, towns, and counties around the U.S.

had banned plastic bags around the U.S. - half of them in the past year. She said she supports a total ban on plastic bags and thinks "Alaska is capable of moving forward with this House bill."

[8:13:39 AM](#)

DAVID NEES, Research Associate, Alaska Policy Forum, observed that representatives from large grocery stores had not weighed in on the issue. He said in Alaska there is a preference to use local control over state government control. He acknowledged that many communities in Alaska "have, indeed, enacted local control measures." He noted that Washington, D.C., is the only place that has imposed a fee on plastic grocery bags. He said there are three states that have banned their use but "three times as many states that prohibit the ban on plastic bags." He related that four states decided that labeling plastic bags for recycling purposes is "a much more effective way of having them enter the environment." He clarified that the idea is to keep plastic bags out of the environment by encouraging people to recycle them. Mr. Nees reiterated that it is a small percentage of the U.S. that has placed fees on plastic bags. He added that some localities have enacted the fee, including Boulder, Colorado, Brownsville, Texas, New York, New York, and Portland, Maine. He repeated that elsewhere there are bans or prohibitions against bags. He opined that recycling would be more effective and "any cost that's incurred on this is going to be passed on to the consumers, so it will have a negative economic impact on the economy of Alaska." He concluded, "We're not particularly in favor of this bill; we'd prefer a recycling program."

[8:16:25 AM](#)

MR. NEES, in response to Representative Saddler, said his research shows about 17 states have either "a ban or a ban" - most want a recycling program. He offered his understanding that charging a fee for a bag is opposed in one or two states - mostly in large cities, such as New York City, where most people walk to grocery stores and need something in which to carry their groceries; in those areas the use of recyclable bags and the recycling of plastic bags is encouraged. He offered to send a link from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) outlining this information.

[8:18:31 AM](#)

ANNEMIEKE POWERS testified that she is a small business owner and engineer, who has worked for the past 25-plus years cleaning up contaminated sites. She stated her main concern with plastic bags is the long-term environmental and economic impact of pollution. She said even when people properly dispose of the bags, too many of them blow out of trash bins and landfills and, because they are so lightweight, are easily transported by water and wind. She asked, "Who's going to clean up the pollution and who's going to pay for it?" She added that her professional experience has shown that "it is cheaper to prevent pollution at the source than to pay for cleanup after the fact," and a bag ban or fee does just that. She said in 2016 the World Economic Forum predicted that at current rates of pollution, the world's oceans would contain more plastic by weight than fish by the year 2050. She said this impairment to the oceans and fishes could have an economic impact to Alaskans. She said protecting the fishing industry was one of the main reasons the City of Cordova imposed a bag ban in 2016.

MS. POWERS said the effect of plastic bags on the food chains of land mammals has not yet been assessed. At the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Experimental Farm, plastic bags have been found in the stomachs of caribou and moose. She said Alaskans rely on "the beauty and health of our land and waters for tourism, hunting, and fishing," and she said she thinks Alaska should be proactive in protecting these resources. She continued:

Since plastic pollution is widespread and not the sole responsibility of any one person, incorporation, or nation, most cleanup costs will likely be borne by government entities, which means it will eventually be paid for by the tax payers; that means by you and by me. And if we don't act, our kids and grandkids will bear any even larger cost, because this pollution problem is not going to go away by itself, but if we don't do anything, it will only grow. Banning or imposing a fee on these bags certainly does not eliminate all plastic pollution, but it is a very simple means of eliminating one, widely used source, and it's an easy way to start, because it's something that can be controlled by the individual. I can't control how companies package their goods, but I can control how I carry them from the store to my car. My household stopped using plastic grocery bags years ago, and honestly it has not been a hardship at all.

[8:21:26 AM](#)

MS. POWERS, in response to Representative Saddler, said she heard from one woman involved in the plastic bag ban in Cordova that the ban has been successful. She said the plastic bag ban passed in Wasilla would not go into effect until July.

[8:23:09 AM](#)

KARLA HART testified in support of HB 264. She said she has traveled extensively in West Coast communities before and after they banned plastic bags, and she has traveled globally in China, Russia, Estonia, Finland, and Switzerland, and in all those places it is routine for people who want a shopping bag to pay for a thicker, reusable one. She offered her understanding that people don't have an issue with this routine. She said the framework for opposition from the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) seemed to be based on concern that store clerks would have difficulty estimating how many bags customers would need, and she opined that is a weak argument indicating the NFIB does not "have much against this ban," because in most of the communities she has visited, customers decide how many bags they want to pay for and how they want to bag their goods. Ms. Hart noted that the City of Seattle, whose population she said she thinks is greater than that of the entire state of Alaska, has had a bag ban in effect since [July 1, 2012], and all the major retailers in Alaska, such as Fred Meyer and Safeway, also operate in Seattle and are already able to handle [the ban]. Ms. Hart urged the committee to [impose the fee on plastic bags, as proposed under HB 264], and then to "tackle other plastic waste that Representative Kreiss-Tomkins mentioned." She added, "There are certainly other things, but this is available; it's a low-hanging fruit to start making a change."

[8:25:37 AM](#)

SUSIE HAYES, Volunteer, Valley Community for Recycling Solutions; Member, Mat-Su Zero Waste Committee and Plastic Bag Committee, said she has lived in Alaska for 30 years and worked for the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) until retirement two years ago. She said she participated in local spring cleanups and picks up trash whenever recreating in Alaska. She said there is a litter problem in the state, part of which is plastic. She said people see plastic bags in trees and along fences, but they don't see the remnants of plastic bags that shred into small pieces and blow into creeks and rivers and flow into the sea.

MS. HAYES expressed concern about "the amount of unnecessary and ... toxic waste going into landfills." She said plastic bags may be reused in homes, but eventually they will take up space in landfills. She said there are over 100,000 people in her borough and growing, and if additional landfills are built, then they will overtake trails and parkland. She opined that single use plastic bags are not necessary and there are so many good alternatives. Cloth bags can be used for years and easily washed and air-dried; paper bags are an alternative that can be repurposed, recycled, and burned. She said when she has offered reusable bags to people, she has heard people decline the offer because they say they already have reusable bags - they just need the encouragement to use them. Ms. Hayes concluded by asking the committee to listen to its constituents and construct legislation that encourages shoppers to bring their own bags and discourages stores from distributing any free plastic bags.

[8:28:53 AM](#)

JAMES SQUYERS testified in opposition to HB 264. He stated, "I am appalled at the seemingly insatiable desire to increase the size, scope, footprint, and influence of government. This is a fine example of government overreach penalizing responsible members of society for the actions of the irresponsible ones." Mr. Squyers offered his understanding that there is already a \$100,000 fine established statewide for littering, which he said is evident from all the signs posted. He suggested an effort be made to "clean up the state one litterbug, one junkie, and one totalitarian politician at a time." He encouraged the committee chair to put the proposed legislation in a drawer and leave it there. He remarked on the number of bills the legislature had introduced with only a 90-day session scheduled.

[8:30:09 AM](#)

MR. SQUYERS, in response to Representative Saddler, confirmed that stores in Rural Deltana issue plastic bags, and he emphasized that those bags fit all his trash cans at home, thus, "everything gets recycled out here."

[8:30:43 AM](#)

WILLIAM HARRINGTON opined that it is "the irresponsible use by the people who get these plastic bags in the stores that are causing the problem." He said the City of Spenard [plants] flowers for the tourists every year, and at the end of the

season, those flowers are put into black plastic bags, loaded into a truck, and taken to the dump. He said it seems crazy to do that with organic material. He emphasized that it is not just store bags that are causing the problem. He said he recycles plastic store bags as garbage bags, and he questioned who does not throw his/her garbage bags into a plastic bag of some sort in the kitchen. He wished the committee good luck with "all this."

[8:32:55 AM](#)

MICHELLE PUTZ, Member, Bags for Change, said there are about 40 people in the group and about a dozen volunteers, including students. She said studies show that plastic is getting into food sources; toxins from plastics are effecting reproductive health in children and infants and could affect the health of fish; plastic, which is made from petrochemicals, lasts forever in the environment; plastic bags can damage and kill wildlife, litter communities, and increase the amount of waste that must be shipped south; and using sustainable bags is a sustainable behavior that is "easy to choose and to change." She relayed that she had spoken with a woman in Sitka whose boat almost ran into the rocks when the motor sucked up a plastic bag and overheated.

MS. PUTZ said Bags for Change is working to try to pass a fee that would pay for tools and reduce electric rates. The group conducted a reusable bag roundup and giveaway, as well as a poster contest to help people remember to bring their reusable bags when shopping. She said a fee may help with reduction of plastic bag use, because it would incentivize behavior change and force customers to make a conscious decision to purchase bags. She added that it also gives people a choice. She said there was a poll done in Sitka, and one of the questions asked whether single use plastic bags should be "a), banned; b), provided, but for a fee that would be used to support Sitka schools and to reduce residents' electric costs; c), handed out for free; or d), no opinion." She said the results will hopefully be in, in the next couple weeks. She said the group also held an informal poll on Sitka Chatters, a Facebook page she described as not progressive, and the results were as follows: 195 said take no action; and 225 said take action, whether a ban or a fee.

MS. PUTZ, regarding HB 264, said she would like the words "operate year-round" deleted from page 4, line 1. She said she thinks whether or not a business operates all year, it should

help pay the fees. She opined that Alaska's visitors should help pay the costs of "the things that we do in our communities."

[8:37:46 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH, after ascertaining that no one else who wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 264.

CO-CHAIR PARISH announced that HB 264 was held over.

**HJR 30-URGE U.S. SUPPORT OF REFUGEES**

[8:39:27 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH announced that the final order of business would be HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 30, Urging the United States Congress to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to promote the safety, health, and well-being of refugees and displaced persons; urging the United States government to uphold its international leadership role in responding to displacement crises with humanitarian assistance and to work with the international community and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to find solutions to conflicts and protect refugees; and urging the President of the United States to continue to mitigate the burden placed on frontline refugee host countries.

[8:39:51 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON, Alaska State Legislature, as prime sponsor, presented HJR 30. He said the source for legislation comes from a variety of sources, including citizens, agencies, and the government. He revealed that the genesis for HJR 30 came from Abby Weiss, an eighth-grade student at Colony Middle School, in Palmer, Alaska. The proposed joint resolution would encourage the federal government to do what it can in its share of carrying the burden in caring for people displaced by humanitarian crises occurring in their nations, including sexual violence, human trafficking, persecution based on religion or nationality, forced conscription, genocide, or exploitation. He said there is no dispute about the crises; the dispute is over what the federal role should be. He said he thinks it is important for the legislature to take note of critical moments in time.

[8:44:12 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said he and Legislative Legal and Research Services reviewed the data in the proposed joint resolution. He explained that the data is "a moving target" depending on the status of a civil war or refugee crisis. Even so, he said he confirmed that the data is "largely accurate - certainly within a span of accuracy" and "grounded in fact." He noted that Ms. Weiss had found her own set of data, which she could share with the committee.

[8:45:16 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said there is a philosophical question raised by HJR 30. He pointed to the phrase "40,300,000 internally displaced people", on page 1, line 11, and asked, "Who are we, in the United States, to establish where people should be inside the borders of their own countries?"

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said the invasion of France, on June 6, 1944, is one example of a time when the U.S. intervened to impact what is going on domestically [in another country]. He said refugees are a byproduct of internally displaced people. He added, "When people are persecuted within, they leave within and move without." He said he thinks that is the significance of the number Representative Saddler quoted.

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said certainly neither he nor anyone else wishes to see people being displaced from their homes; however, he questioned what the obligation of the U.S. is to take care of the rest of the world and whether the U.S. is "the world's policeman."

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON responded that he thinks there is a sharing of the duty and many countries do not think the U.S. is doing its share. He elucidated as follows:

... There was a system in place that ... scrutinized refugees that might come to this country in a way that was protective of those of us who live in the country, and ... we have toughened those standards in a way that is harmful to the world community, and as a consequence, we haven't done our share of dealing with displaced persons crises and ... we've asked for Europeans, largely, and some countries like Jordan to bear that ... burden.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON said HJR 30 states that as a matter of principle, the Alaska State Legislature is sympathetic and believes [the U.S.] has the resources, power, and moral courage to do its share "and be cognizant of the breadth of the problem."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER said the U.S. does not necessarily follow the directives of other countries. He said the U.S. is involved in the United Nations and gives foreign aid; therefore, he opined that the country is doing "an awful lot for refugees." He offered his understanding that the sponsor had said that the U.S. has a refugee policy that is protective of its citizens but tougher on the world community. He posited that that is an appropriate function of the government, to consider the benefits of its current residents over the benefits of potential residents. He said most everyone wants to come to the U.S., as it is a place of opportunity; however, he asked if the obligation of the U.S. is to allow everyone to "join the United States" who desires to do so.

REPRESENTATIVE JOSEPHSON offered his understanding that in 1916 U.S. President Woodrow Wilson "ran against helping Europe with its war problem" and then "entered us into war within two years"; therefore, "you can see how those things can change quickly." He said he thinks President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt would have like to get the country into war faster but "the country wasn't interested." He added, "But then the problem came to us anyway." He said he thinks that is why he likes HJR 30, because it is hard to not participate in the problems that are "headed your way." He said he does not think the proposed joint resolution would call for the U.S. to "house and care for a certain number of refugees" but simply that the U.S. recognize the crisis is there, be sympathetic to it, and play a role in helping find a solution. He said resolutions tend to be aspirational rather than spelling out "we will do X, Y, and Z."

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER reiterated that the US government contributes heavily in the United Nations, whose mission is "just this kind of international and intranational global refugee enumeration."

[8:53:40 AM](#)

GABBY WEISS testified in support of HJR 30. She read her written statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

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.

Another aspect is that makes 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[s] 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 don't worry, even though we can't help everyone, we 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 we could lift up. Also, the United States can benefit from taking refugees in 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 common thought preventing Americans from welcoming refugees is the idea that refugees are the same thing as terrorists. As of 2015, expert Kathleen Newland from the Migration Policy Institute says, "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." To add to this, the US Department of State explains, that on average, it takes 18 to 24 months to process refugees into the US. This process includes in depth vetting. This long and vigorous process is another reason why terrorists would not choose to act as refugees to get into the US.

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. It is our duty because if we were running away from violence and persecution and natural disasters, we would want the

people who were safe and healthy to stand up and support us. It is that simple. 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.

[8:58:48 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER commended Ms. Weiss for her well-written and ably presented testimony.

[8:58:57 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH concurred. He asked Ms. Weiss, "Why do you think we have this responsibility?"

MS. WEISS answered that it is a moral responsibility, because "if we were in that situation, we would want people to stand up and help us."

[9:00:07 AM](#)

NICHOLAS STEEN testified in opposition to HJR 30. He opined that the State of Alaska has no justification to interject itself into the international refugee problem, because international problems are reserved for the federal government. He stated, "We have elected representatives in Washington, D.C., responsible for reflecting our views on these matters." He said Alaska has a multitude of problems needing attention, including crime, education, deteriorating roads and infrastructure, and excessive spending depleting the state's spending account. He said he has yet to speak to any of his friends that support HJR 30, and he encouraged the committee not to support it.

[9:01:49 AM](#)

ROBERT FAWCETT stated that he believes "we should help as much as we can" but, considering "all of the stuff our government struggles with," questioned who would be responsible for taking on refugees, "financially, physically," and regarding housing.

[9:03:15 AM](#)

CHARLES DUNCAN opined that "we should take care of ourselves before we bring in any refugees." He explained that he is not worried about terrorists but about not being financially or

mentally prepared to take on "as many refugees as we want." He continued:

Taking care of yourself should be more important than taking care of other people. I know that doesn't sound right, but it's true. We should focus on our debt, our housing, and when we get to the point where we can help other people, that's when we should.

[9:04:37 AM](#)

MELISSA KEMBERLING stated that testimony she has heard seems to reflect that "it's an either/or solution." She countered that she thinks the U.S. can take care of itself while working with other countries "to be a leader," which she said the U.S. has been viewed as for many years. As a leader, the U.S. could bring others to the table to co-solve the issue and co-fund [the efforts]. Ms. Kemberling said she does a lot of community work in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) area and problems are solved through cooperative effort. She said she does not view this issue as being any different.

[9:06:08 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR PARISH closed public testimony on HJR 30.

CO-CHAIR PARISH announced that HJR 30 was held over.

[9:06:31 AM](#)

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Community and Regional Affairs Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 9:06 a.m.