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## 148 Pandering to fear is not the American way

**R**ecall Thanksgiving afternoon as you watched football and digested turkey after giving much thanks for your freedom, blessings and family.

Imagine hearing the doorbell as you're dozing. At the door is a young brown woman, heavy with child. She's wearing a scarf on her head. On the street, you see a beat-up car with a man inside.

The woman holds her belly. "Sir, my husband, Jose, and I have no place to stay tonight. We're new to this country and haven't been able to find steady work. We're cold. We're hungry. But we're not any trouble. We're legal — we're refugees. Can you help us tonight?"

You're perplexed, torn, conflicted. What should you do? Like most Americans, you're generous. You're kind. But this? Somebody else should deal with it, right? What do you know about these people, this woman who claims her name is Maria?

America, a nation made strong by immigrants, is once again confronting nasty, Joe McCarthy-like debates about immigration — about who should be in the country and who shouldn't.

Most Americans seem to forget that in just about everyone's background is an immigrant like Jose or Maria who turned up on these shores to start a better or different life, some as immigrants, some as slaves, and others as refugees from war and violence. With each wave of new arrivals, some Americans were frightened at first, worried by the backgrounds, baggage and competition that the newcomers brought. But over time, each new wave became part of the fabric of the nation, adding new strength



**Andy Brack**  
Statehouse Report

to the diversity of people called Americans.

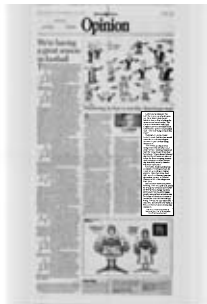
With just about every family's immigrant past, it's unsettling how quickly so many forget and fall into xenophobia, the fear or irrational dislike of foreigners. Case in point: Gov. Nikki Haley, a brown woman and daughter of Sikh immigrants who has joined 29 other governors — all but one Republican — in saying Syrian refugees shouldn't be resettled in the Palmetto State.

Really, Governor? The overwhelming majority of refugees, all of whom go through extensive background checks, are women and children. Where's your Christian charity? Where's your leadership? You could be a spokeswoman to highlight how America is the land of opportunity for all. Instead, you conveniently join the crowd of pandering politicians and seem to forget how your family was welcomed into the United States.

Meanwhile, GOP presidential candidates turn up the heat with vitriol and rhetoric, inflaming feelings of fear. Chief fearmonger is billionaire Donald Trump, who talks about maintaining databases of Muslims and making them wear identification, the same kind of labeling done in Nazi Germany to Jews, gays and Communists.



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Ladies and gentlemen, this isn't the America in which I grew up. We're better than the political nonsense that is fueling the airwaves and social media. The Greatest Generation toiled and fought to preserve freedom for all, understanding what one president said: "The only thing to fear is fear itself."

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee recently wrote that his state would continue to welcome refugees because it's part of what being American is:

"The American character is being tested. Will we hew to our long tradition of being a beacon of hope for those chased from their homelands? I have always believed that the United States is a place of refuge for those escaping persecution, starvation or other horrors that thankfully most in America will never experience."

Since 2002, South Carolina has accepted 1,813 refugees from 30 countries, according to federal sources. More than a one third (680) were from Burma. Iraq was the mother country to 249 and Ukraine to 205. One refugee was from Syria.

Fear, as Inslee notes, is a powerful thing. If we succumb to it, aren't we letting the terrorists win? Aren't we letting them change our lives of freedom? We shouldn't blame people running from terrorists into the refuge of America or France or Sweden for what the terrorists are doing. Instead, we, like other free countries, should welcome them so they can blossom from victims into capitalists.

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