

July 29, 2014

Dear Mayors Weston, Hillard, and Jean; City Managers Joyal, Belmore, and Fitzpatrick,

My name is Paul Spellman. I have been following with deep concern the possibility of Congolese refugees being relocated to your cities. I was born and raised in Dover and attended local schools. I spent most of my professional life as a part-owner and the operator of a business in Lewiston, Maine. I have since retired and am living in Florida. I write to you because I care about and am very concerned about the future of your communities if the refugees are eventually relocated. Having lived through this situation in Lewiston I believe I am qualified to give you an honest and straightforward assessment of what to expect and what will soon become of your cities if it happens. The government's definition of "refugees" today could not be further from the traditional definition. Although ORIS has cancelled the August 13 meeting, do not believe for a moment that they have gone away for good. They have retreated because they realize, due to the national immigration issues, public sentiment is not on their side. When they do return, expect them to be very tactical in their approach, better prepared, and wield a heavier hand.

The first group of Somali refugees arrived in Lewiston in 2002 during the dark of night. Nobody, including city officials, was prepared for the onslaught of people who arrived with nothing but the shirts on their backs. The number that arrived initially is still not known today, but most estimates are between 1000 and 2000. To this day the number of refugees currently living in Lewiston is not known. Given their tribal nature some leave, some come back, some don't come back, some move on to surrounding towns and new refugees and newer tribes continue to arrive. Although there is no concrete number, the total number of refugees living in Lewiston in 2014 is believed to be around 6000.

Fosters Daily Democrat recently reported that a representative from ORIS stated *only* 100 Congolese will be relocated to the Tri-City area. To believe ORIS' number would be dangerously naive. That number simply represents the *first wave*. The first wave to arrive in Lewiston were Somalis. Shortly thereafter the Bantus arrived, and since then there has been a steady flow of both groups as well as new groups arriving in Lewiston. Since that time many have had additional children, and some now have grandchildren even further taxing the resources of the city.

The burden on the taxpayers in that city of about 36,000 has been tremendous. Lewiston is a poor city in a poor state. State and federal governments have not and will not pick up refugee related expenses leaving the taxpayers of Lewiston to bear the entire financial burden. In very many cases this burden is at the expense of the working poor, veterans, disabled, and elderly, most of whom have lived and worked their entire lives in Lewiston. When it comes to social services expect the refugees to go directly to the head of the line.

If ORIS is successful, you should expect your costs for increase much more than proportionately. Many of the positions, such as Lewiston's "Cultural Broker" whose job responsibility is to navigate refugee issues in the schools, will be positions you currently do not have. You should plan for the needs of additional teachers and administrators to provide

training to current and future teachers in English as a second language. According to former Lewiston City Administrator Jim Bennett, Lewiston had 50 students enrolled in ESL prior to the Somalis arrival. That number skyrocketed to 300 in just the first year after their arrival. Upon their arrival, Lewiston provided one neighborhood school for the children of the immigrants to attend. Meeting the definition of "neighborhood", it was located in the neighborhood where the Somalis resided. You should be prepared for the outrage from parents and children when the Congolese demand their children be allowed to attend other neighborhood schools thereby displacing the children currently enrolled in their own neighborhood schools and that those children be moved to the school in the Somali neighborhood. Fortunately those attempts were unsuccessful because the residents, parents and students stood together. If they had not, neighborhood schools in Lewiston would be no longer.

If ORIS is successful, be prepared to increase the budgets and manpower for your police departments as well as adding additional police in the schools. The Somali and Bantu tribes are constantly at odds and there have been numerous public incidents of physical altercations between the two tribes. Lewiston also has its share of Somali gang activity. According to a December 17, 2009 article in the *Lewiston Sun-Journal*, Lewiston Deputy Chief of Police James Minkowsky stated "we haven't seen that it's been fueled by alcohol or drugs but in some cases they seem to do it for the thrill of it". The article goes on to state that police said prior to these attacks group robberies were almost unheard of in Lewiston. Minkowsky goes on to say "we're not seeing the colors or the monikers but it's still a gang mentality".

You should expect accusations of racism and for political correctness to rear its ugly head. Most Lewiston residents will not speak openly or publicly about the Somalis or the Bantus or the other groups nor speak to the issues the city is facing. They choose instead to keep their concerns to themselves, or at the most, to a close circle of friends, for fear of being labeled racist. This has caused a number of good people who would make excellent elected city representatives stay away from running for office out of fear of what happened to former mayor Laurier Raymond could happen to them. Mayor Raymond made national headlines after writing a letter to the Somali leaders asking them to please hold off from bringing more of them to Lewiston as the city could no longer afford the increasing financial burden. National media picked up on the story labeling him a racist for simply doing what he was elected to do, govern the city.

Publications such as *The New Yorker* and *Newsweek* would have you believe that the influx of Somalis and Bantus has "revived" downtown Lewiston. Most residents feel much differently and many residents and non-residents now refer to the area as "Little Mogadishu". I can't stress enough the critical point you are now at for both the city you serve and your legacies as leaders. Before ORIS returns you need to have a well laid-out plan in effect.

There has been some public chatter that "nothing can be done". I do not believe that. There is strength in numbers. You are fortunate to have the benefit of three communities working together and by working together, you can defeat this when ORIS comes back with a heavier hand. Do not assume because they called off the August 13 meeting that this matter has gone away. If proactive steps are not taken now, your communities will be changed forever.

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. To that end I would highly recommend that each of you take the hour and a half drive up to Lewiston to see firsthand what your cities will

look like very shortly after the refugees come to your town. I would also encourage you to speak with current Lewiston Mayor Bob Mac Donald who I have spoken with today. He has offered to answer any questions and speak to any concerns you may have. Bob is a straight-shooter and a no-nonsense individual, and he has been successful in overcoming many of the problems Lewiston has faced. He can be reached at (207) 784-3045. If he is not available he has asked that you leave a message and he will return your call. Should you prefer to contact him by e-mail that address is rmacdonald@lewistonmaine.gov.

Thank you for your time. I wish you all the best in this challenge.

Sincerely,
Paul Spellman