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Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2016 7:20 AM
To: Gray, Laura
Subject: MEDIA CLIPS FOR THURSDAY, JULY 14

ST. ALBANS MESSENGER:

At \$300,000 a pop who can afford a big family in Vt.?

EMERSON LYNN

There are two candidates vying to be Vermont's next governor who have made increasing the state's population an important part of their campaigns: Democrat Matt Dunne and Republican Phil Scott. Both would like to see Vermont with a population of 700,000, up from the 626,000 we now have.

In the same moment, U.S. Census figures for 2015 show that fewer babies were born to Vermonters than anytime since the Civil War [a time when the state's population was half what it is today.] Figures from the Internal Revenue Service also show that the biggest net outflow of Vermonters leaving the state was among filers 26 years of age or younger.

With history as a guide, it's hard to imagine any public policy effort that would contribute much to a change in trends. Short of a gold rush, or promises of free housing, public policy changes rarely make a difference. It's usually more fruitful to figure out how to keep people from leaving and to overcome the obstacles to higher fertility rates.

But how do you convince couples to have children?

Or, better yet, why are they choosing not to, or to have one child instead of two, or three?

First, let's disabuse ourselves of the thought that this is Vermont's problem and no one else's. New England as a region has the nation's lowest fertility rate. The other five states don't do any better on the child-producing front than Vermont.

The common denominators we hold in common are ethnicity and education. New England is almost 85 percent white, and, as a region, we have the highest percentage of adults with college educations. Both demographics have lower fertility rates than those states with higher levels of diversification and lower education levels.

Unless we designate ourselves as a destination for war-torn refugees, or as a start-up state for immigrants of color, we're not going to change our ethnicity mix. Vermont, which is about 95 percent lily white, is going to remain lily white.

Then, there are the basics. Young couples today are being forced to make calculations that their

parents and grandparents didn't have to make. For the vast majority of today's young couples, both have to work to be able to afford the house they live in and the taxes they must pay.

The estimated cost of raising a child from birth to age 18 is over \$300,000 and that doesn't include college [or soccer camps.] That's for one child, and no discounts are offered for having a second. Two children will set you back \$600,000 [still no college costs.] Remember when you were told your home would be your biggest investment? Not so. [And, unlike your home, it's generally frowned upon to try to sell the kids at age 18 to get your money back.] Today's young couples understand upfront that if they do have children, most will need to find suitable childcare. Not only is that expensive, it doesn't exist in sufficient numbers. Not in Vermont. It's just one more thing to add to the "why bother" pile.

As more couples reach the same conclusion it becomes more acceptable to forego children. It's a comfort in numbers thought. A generation ago going childless was the exception. Two generations ago it was commonplace to have four children and having no children was the stuff that filled the neighborhoods with gossip. Today, not only does the stigma not exist, it's become more the norm.

The expense of life in general has contributed to couples delaying marriage vows until their late 20s or early 30s. Additionally, and most dramatic, the percentage of married couple families has dropped from a high of about two-thirds of all households in the 1950s to about 45 percent today.

As important as it may be to increase Vermont's population – and it is – it's also important to be realistic as to how this can be accomplished.

With these challenges in mind it would be helpful to hear from the candidates as to how these non-policy realities might be addressed.

Letters

Now I know why our Peter Shumlin wanted to legalize pot!

Gloria Brown, St. Albans

Recently, I was watching the news on television and the comment Gov. Peter Shumlin made to Vermont State troopers to back off minor infractions that might go on at the Rainbow Family Gathering down in southern Vermont. No wonder Shumlin wanted to legalize pot so fast. Just think of the money he could have made selling in that crowd! If I was one of the troopers I would check Shumlin's back yard. The one where he was running naked with a bear a couple of years ago. He has probably got some pot growing out there! O.M.G. Do you think he could be the Church Street naked man? What aguy, he just keeps on making us proud.

TIMES ARGUS/RUTLAND HERALD:

Young Vt. GOP delegate bucks Trump, draws fire

MONTPELIER — A Vermont teenager who is a delegate to the Republican National Convention is getting a taste of the rough-and-tumble of politics.

Jace Laquerre, whose senior year in high school is still ahead of him, is headed to the GOP convention in Cleveland next week. The 17-year-old is not supporting presumptive nominee Donald Trump, and has been targeted by ample online vitriol and an aborted attempt to remove him from the delegation.

One online posting said he deserved to be horsewhipped, tarred and feathered if he didn't follow his state's rules on voting. Others have labeled him a little runt, and a snot-nosed, wet-behind-the-ears kid.

His mom, Lori Laquerre, isn't taking kindly to the comments. "It's hard to see somebody attacking your son like that," she said.

Jace Laquerre said he takes them in stride. When he's not politicking, he's working this summer as a youth league soccer referee. Occasional complaints about calls have thickened his skin.

"The hate mail doesn't bother me so much," he said.

But he noted he was interviewed on a radio program recently with a young Democratic delegate from Maine.

"We didn't agree on much. But what we did agree on is that we all need to calm down," he said.

Laquerre said he first got interested in politics when Kentucky's Republican Sen. Rand Paul, then a presidential candidate, made a trip to Vermont last summer. Soon, he had signed on as the high school coordinator in the state for the Paul campaign.

When Paul later dropped out, Laquerre's allegiance switched to Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, for whom the teenager voted in Vermont's March primary. Under state law, residents who turn 18 by election day — Laquerre does on Aug. 21 — can vote in the primary, even if it's before their 18th birthday.

At the state party convention in May, Laquerre was elected a delegate for Ohio Gov. John Kasich. But when Kasich dropped out, his delegates became "unbound" under party rules.

"I was surprised that I came in fourth out of like 40 people" seeking 16 delegate slots, though he had been campaigning with fellow Republicans through phone calls, emails and a flier he handed out at the event.

Now, Laquerre said he likely would shift his support at the convention back to Paul, “just to make a point.”

He pointed to Trump’s past support for abortion rights and questioned the businessman’s support for gun rights.

“I don’t think he has real conservative principles,” Laquerre said.

But he also expects he’ll end up voting for Trump in November. “I’m not a never-Trump guy. I’m a never-Trump guy for the primary, right until the last ballot is cast at the convention.”

Darcie Johnston, Trump’s campaign director in Vermont, said she looked into the legality of Laquerre’s status, and determined he’s eligible to serve as a delegate and did not launch a credentials challenge.

Candidate Galbraith outlines primary care plan

NEAL GOSWAMI

MONTPELIER — Democratic gubernatorial candidate Peter Galbraith unveiled a \$220 million universal primary care plan he hopes to finance with a payroll tax.

Galbraith said on Wednesday his plan would have no deductibles, co-pays or premiums and would be paid for by a 2 percent payroll tax on employers. It would ensure all Vermonters could see a primary care physician with no out-of-pocket expenses, according to Galbraith.

“I am persuaded by the argument that if you make primary care free ... that you get better health outcomes,” he said. “That’s really the most important thing; that people go and see a doctor and it gets treated early.”

A publicly financed primary care system could be implemented without waivers from the federal government that would be required for a single-payer health care system, Galbraith said. It is less costly and more easily implemented, he said.

“We have a very clear estimate of what it’s going to cost and it’s very affordable. It’s the least complicated thing to fit into the existing system,” he said.

The Agency of Administration, according to Galbraith, has estimated such a plan will cost \$200 million, including administrative costs. His plan would include a 10 percent increase in reimbursements to primary care doctors, raising the total cost to \$225 million. The 2 percent payroll tax he is proposing would raise \$240 million, he said.

The payroll tax would be a deductible business expense for employers. Galbraith said that would mean, essentially, that the federal government would help subsidize the cost of a universal primary care system in Vermont. Businesses that provide health insurance to

employees should see the cost of the payroll tax “partially or entirely” offset by savings in health care premiums for their employees, he said.

The payroll tax should not serve as a disincentive for businesses to expand, Galbraith said.

“The reason businesses hire people is because they have work that needs to be done” Galbraith said. “A 2 percent increase in their payroll is not going to be a huge disincentive. If the business already provides health coverage, then they should see a reduction in their premiums because a part of the service is already being paid for. This should work out as a wash, maybe a savings for some and a slight increase for others.”

Galbraith said businesses that do not offer health care insurance as a benefit could adjust wages to cover the cost of the payroll tax.

“The only ones who can’t do that are those paying minimum wage,” Galbraith said.

Matt Dunne, one of Galbraith’s primary rivals, recently announced his support for a universal primary care system. Dunne, however, did not provide specifics about its cost or how it would be paid for.

Galbraith said he is attempting to be as straightforward as possible with Vermonters about what he hopes to achieve as governor.

“My plan is different from Matt’s. My plan comes with a way to pay for it — a 2 percent payroll tax,” he said. “I think he was not really very forthcoming on that.”

“If I’m elected there is a mandate. I’m not playing any games,” Galbraith added.

Part of Galbraith’s health care plan includes curbing executive pay at the state’s hospitals. He said he would seek a cap of \$350,000 per year for such positions. The Green Mountain Care Board, the state’s health care regulatory body that approves hospital budgets, has failed to rein in the high salaries, Galbraith said.

“I’m doing what nobody else has done, which is highlight CEO pay,” he said. “We’re not putting anybody in the poor house. It’s just a reasonable salary.”

Additionally, Galbraith said he would look to require equal reimbursement rates at all Vermont hospitals. Currently, insurers pay higher rates at academic hospitals.

Opinion | Editorials

Opening hearts

Police officers who stop a motorist and search the car because the color of the driver’s skin has aroused their suspicion are not following the rules. Police must have a reasonable suspicion of

wrongdoing before detaining or searching someone. It is a right of the individual protected by the Fourth Amendment that none of us may be subject to arbitrary search, and a search initiated on the basis of race is the definition of arbitrary.

When an officer breaks this rule, he jeopardizes his case. If his illegal search yields evidence of wrongdoing, the evidence is not allowed in court. This protection of individual rights may produce a frustrating result: people caught with a load of illegal drugs who go free because the officer did not follow the rules. But we lose more if privacy rights are not respected. Instead of one possibly guilty suspect eluding prosecution, the constitutional right that protects all of us would be obliterated.

That is the issue at the heart of the case of Shamel Alexander, who was arrested by Bennington police in 2013 for heroin trafficking. They had stopped him carrying heroin worth \$5,000 to \$8,000, and he had been sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Earlier this year, the Vermont Supreme Court overturned his conviction, saying that Alexander had been subject to racial profiling: stopped by police because he was black. Now he is suing the Bennington Police Department because of his treatment.

It is worth considering this case in light of recent events. The killing of black men by police in Louisiana and Minnesota, followed by the killing of five police officers in Dallas, has focused attention on the racial tensions that exist, even in a state like Vermont. President Barack Obama delivered an inspired speech at the memorial service in Dallas on Tuesday, asking us to open our hearts and to look at events with the eyes of the other. That means understanding what police officers in places like Bennington, Rutland or Barre are thinking and experiencing. It means seeing patterns of law enforcement the way that black people see them.

It is not one thing or the other. By this time, we ought to see that the American experience is many things and we must learn to hold them in our heads and hearts at the same time. It is the experience of black people who are routinely pulled over, stopped, detained, frisked, manhandled, arrested and jailed at rates far exceeding the rates to which white people are subject. "We know this," Obama said. There is no use denying it.

At the same time, we are asking our police departments to crack down on the traffic of addictive drugs into our communities. It is not an easy job. Lately, we have been asking them to do more — to become community builders, addiction specialists, social workers, peacemakers. Obama acknowledged that the police in our communities have been given a heavy load. Taking a shortcut by stopping someone because he or she is black thus becomes an understandable temptation, even if it is one that the courts are bound by the Constitution not to permit.

There may be little sympathy for Alexander. After all, police found him in possession of a marketable amount of heroin. There may be a temptation to say that he got off because of a technicality.

But the Constitution is not a technicality. Those who think otherwise say that innocent people have nothing to worry about, but we would all have something to worry about if the police were not required to honor and respect our dignity as individuals. The experience of innocent black people in America ought to teach us that.

White Americans might ask themselves whether they would respond with the same forbearance, patience, humility and restraint that generations of black people have had to learn if they too were subject to aggressively arbitrary policing. At the same time, enforcing the law while following its strict demands is a vocation of the highest idealism. The protesters in Dallas and the police who were protecting them were all engaged in the same exercise. It is called democracy.

Opinion | Commentary

Adair: We, the unteachable

Mark Adair is a Montpelier business and property owner.

Several months ago, Newport's high hopes were dashed. Fingers are still pointed at Ariel Quiros and Bill Stenger, Gov. Shumlin and Sen. Leahy. But aren't there a few thousand other culprits hiding in the shadows? We, the people, never questioned whether Newport's hopes should have been raised in the first place. We nodded to growth, because we can't be taught that development is obsolete.

Development was once perhaps a servant to humanity, when we were carving habitations from the wilderness. But it changed into a nuisance, as our species outgrew its fair share of the planet. Finally, a half century ago, when the world began to burst at the seams, development became a curse. We grieved the vanishing open land, groused about congestion, and grimaced at the rising noise levels; but we couldn't — or wouldn't — connect the dots between population, development and our sorrows.

Perhaps the terrible implication of our duty to end development makes us refuse to understand what Martin Luther King called — in 1966 before humanity doubled its size — “the plague of overpopulation.” That duty demands that we relinquish, against every human instinct of love and justice, our sentimental view of children, immigrants and economic growth; the sacred triad of our troubles. It demands we elect leaders who understand how the thirst for growth and parenthood is spreading misery over our state, nation and world.

Had Vermonters been teachable, there'd been no building boom in Berlin, no urbanization of Waterbury, no con-urbanization of Burlington, no expansion of ski resorts, and no gubernatorial hopefuls like Phil Scott who, without blushing, proposes packing 70,000 more people into Vermont.

Growth gushes money, which gives meaning to the lives of developers, polishes the reputations of government officials and makes visions of dollars dance in the citizenry's heads. Growth is, therefore, good and — recalling a line from Monty Python's notorious paean to human over-

reproduction — needed in our neighborhood. Nothing seems to teach us out of this belief: not the Atlantic Ocean rolling through Greenwich Village in 2012, or regularly washing the streets of doomed Miami Beach; not superstorm Irene's unprecedented violence, ripping away Vermont's bridges, roads and houses; not three billion people scrambling to find fresh water; and not — to cite an arguably less-ominous scene in our neighborhood — traffic jams on Montpelier's Main Street.

These lessons are lost, not only on Shumlin, Leahy and Scott, but on Montpelier's leaders, too. The planning commission, city council, Downstreet Housing Community Development and Montpelier Alive are dedicating their city to growth — growth in Sabin's Pasture, Taylor Street and Main Street. We should grow, according to Montpelier Alive's Ashley Witzenberger, to "keep up with the changing times," to "grow into an innovative city," even though the Capital City, by Witzenberger's own honest admission, is already "a vibrant economic hub." It seems we are reduced to fixing things that aren't broken, so slavishly are we shackled to an ideology from which the lessons of reality have been unable to free us.

Dr. King would be undecieved by the slippery words that have justified this ideology: We've called growth "smart," "sustainable," "net zero," "low-income, affordable housing" — called it every name developers, social activists or environmentalists could think up. But all growth, big or small, rapacious or humane, anywhere, by inviting more population, as development always does, degrades the climate, consumes nonrenewable resources, and crowds us. There are no exceptions to this rule, whether in Montevideo, Montreal or Montpelier. Growth diminishes human life.

May Newport, reality's most recent tap on the shoulder, wake us from the beguiling group dream before our charming village and beautiful state, slowly sinking under their rising numbers, are irretrievably lost.

Racial bias concerns voiced in Vt.

JOSH OGORMAN

WILLISTON — Artist and community organizer Edwin Owusu broke down in tears at the thought of Alton Sterling, a black man who was shot dead last week by police in Louisiana.

Like Sterling, who was killed by police when confronted for selling CDs outside a convenience store, Owusu — who attended the University of Vermont on a debate scholarship — has sold CDs on the street.

"I watched a man who was shot while being held down by police for doing what I do, and what I've done many times to make a living for my children," Owusu said with tears in his eyes.

Owusu was one of several people who spoke at a campaign event Wednesday afternoon for Sen. David Zuckerman, who is seeking the democratic nomination for lieutenant governor.

“We are here to start or continue a conversation, but to really start a new page in Vermont where we really tackle the issues of racial bias and discrimination and inherent biases in ourselves, both as individuals and as a state,” Zuckerman said.

Released in May, a study commissioned by the Vermont State Police and carried out by Northeastern University showed significant disparities between the frequency with which black motorists and white motorists are pulled over and cited in the state.

According to a report from the ACLU of Vermont, an analysis of almost 50,000 State Police stops from July 2010 to June 2011 found nonwhite drivers received citations or tickets more often than white drivers and their vehicles were slightly more likely to be searched.

During the most recent legislative session, House lawmakers passed a bill that would have required Vermont’s police officers to undergo “bias-free” training, and for departments to report traffic-stop data to a common database. On the Senate side, the bill was referred to committee and died.

“As lieutenant governor, we will make sure this conversation doesn’t fade into the background as it unfortunately has often done after such tragedies,” Zuckerman said, referring to the shooting deaths last week of two black men by white police officers, as well as the five police officers who were killed in Dallas by a black gunman.

“Accountability plays a part on both sides,” said Jamell Rogers, a black singer/songwriter who also spoke at the event. “I know there is a lot of pressure on both sides, with people thinking they are not accountable and they are not at fault. I don’t think anything is going to change until we first acknowledge it.”

Sunflowers pose barrier for pipeline construction

By Dan Colton

A Vermont Gas Systems request to remove a threatened flower species from a construction zone has resulted in a public hearing scheduled for this month.

The Agency of Natural Resources announced Wednesday that VGS filed an application to remove hundreds of threatened “harsh sunflower,” or *helianthus strumosus*, from a plot of land in Monkton where pipeline is slated to be laid. The company said an alternative to removing the sunflowers would include a project redesign and cost up to \$1.4 million — which would be borne by ratepayers who have seen the project price tag steadily increase — and prompted the company to seek the ANR permit.

According to the company’s application, the plot of land was surveyed earlier this summer, and roughly 2,000 of the plants were identified by a consultant. The permit said up to 717 harsh sunflowers — or 36 percent of the species’ population in that local area — need to be removed from the plot before construction can begin.

Vermont Gas Systems, which serves 50,000 customers, said the pipeline will bring natural gas to thousands of customers. VGS said it has lowered its customers' rates 15 percent during the past six years, but the pipeline project has been harried by protests, public-advocacy organizations, cost increases and calls for resignations of public officials.

Sen. Bernie Sanders even mentioned the pipeline unfavorably during his time on the presidential campaign trail.

The first phase of the 41-mile Addison County Pipeline was approved in 2013. Price hikes have brought the project's cost to about \$165.6 million, of which up to \$134.5 million will be paid by the company's ratepayers. Citing cost concerns, portions of the pipeline have been dropped from plans altogether.

Beth Parent, VGS spokeswoman, said the company would take the sunflowers and transplant them elsewhere if approval is granted by the ANR.

"Vermont Gas has a strong commitment to environmental protection including land conservation and habitat protection," Parent wrote in an email Wednesday. "We routinely work with organizations to protect threatened and endangered species and conserve habitat."

Christine Gjessing, a representative for the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife, said Agency of Natural Resource's secretary Deb Markowitz will make the decision whether to grant the permit.

"She will consider the scientific recommendations of staff and the Endangered and Threatened Species Committee," Gjessing said Wednesday. "She will also consider ... the potential long-term impacts on the species itself," and not the project's past controversies.

Gjessing said, "Her charge is not to deal with the politics. Her charge is to look at the statutory provisions for threatened and endangered species, and make a decision based on that criteria. That's what she does. She plays it straight."

An expert on the harsh sunflower wasn't available for comment Wednesday, but the eradication or relocation of one species — especially a native species such as harsh sunflower — has potential to affect an entire ecosystem, said Mark Scott, biologist with the Department of Fish & Wildlife.

He said ecosystems with complexity and variety tend to flourish more readily as a rule of the natural world. Removing one species could affect another species with surprising results, he said.

Steve Parren, biologist for the department, said harsh sunflowers bring additional diversity, and provide food sources in the form of sunflower seeds, but the plants aren't considered

“keystone” or cornerstone species of their ecosystems.

“But it’s part of the choir out there,” Parren said.

The public hearing is scheduled for Montpelier at 2:30 p.m. July 28 on the fifth floor of 1 National Life Drive. Public comments and questions will be taken, and comments, emailed to ANR.EndangeredPermit@state.vt.us, will be included in the hearing.

EPA delivers more brownfields funding

By SUSAN SMALLHEER

BRATTLEBORO — The Windham Regional Commission has received \$350,000 in federal funds to replenish its brownfields program’s revolving loan fund.

Susan McMahon, associate director of the Brattleboro-based commission, said Wednesday that projects in Bellows Falls and Brattleboro would likely be first in line for the additional funding.

McMahon said the \$350,000 brings the total of federal brownfields funding the WRC has received since it established a brownfields program to \$4.45 million, including \$1.85 million for revolving loan funds, with the balance for assessment studies. She said the program had first received funding in 2011.

“Southeastern Vermont does have a lot of brownfields sites,” she said.

She said the commission’s program either makes grants to towns and nonprofit agencies, such as local historical societies, or makes loans to private organizations to help clean up contaminated sites.

The loans are repaid to the WRC, providing additional funding to more projects, she said.

McMahon said the program was not just cleaning up polluted industrial sites, but it was also reinforcing one of the state’s planning goals of maintaining village cores and leaving rural areas relatively free of development.

She said while no decision has been made on who will get the latest infusion of cash from the federal Environmental Protection Agency, she said the cleanup of the Robertson Paper Mill in downtown Bellows Falls, and the Arch Street project, a plan by the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center in downtown Brattleboro, were already “in the pipeline.”

Other projects include the livery building next to the New England Youth Theater, also in downtown Brattleboro.

She said there are three regional planning commissions that have set up regional brownfield programs — the Windham Regional Commission, the Southern Windsor County Regional

Planning Commission, and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission.

As a result, she said, WRC can give loans outside of its usual geographic area, and that a loan might be given to the Pownal hydro-project.

“Bennington does not have this kind of funding,” she said, referring to the regional commission.

McMahon said southeastern Vermont was one of the earliest parts of the state to experience industrial development, whether it was paper pulp mills in Bellows Falls, or machine shops in Brattleboro.

Opinion | Commentary

Rutland and refugees: avoiding abstraction

Daniel Judt is a resident of East Wallingford and a student at Yale. He just completed six months working with refugees in Paris at Association Pierre Claver.

Who is a refugee? I didn't hear much about this on Monday, when the Board of Aldermen voted to stymie, at least temporarily, Rutland's role in a proposed refugee relocation program.

I was not at the meeting, but I watched the recorded debate the next day. Nor am I a year-round Rutland resident — I have gone between New York City and East Wallingford since 2004 — but I just returned from six months teaching French to refugees in Paris, France.

Rutland is not Paris. And yet Monday's aldermen's debate convinced me that the difference hardly matters. The false assumptions surrounding refugees are universal. On Monday, I heard one which struck me as particularly familiar.

It is this: Both sides — Rutland Welcomes, Rutland First — argue from moral responsibility to the weak. Which weak, though? One side says Rutland: too poor, too addicted, too riddled with crime. The other says the refugee: a heavy heart, a beaten body, eyes scratched by one too many horrors. You have a moral obligation. On that we agree. But obligation to whom? To what?

In Paris, I watched 150 refugees from all countries and backgrounds — from university-educated Syrian elites to Afghan farmers without a day of schooling — make their way in a messy, anonymous metropolis. They had lived atrocious horrors at home. But to them, the more immediate horror was the idea of remaining uprooted — without country, without community, politically invisible. They were fiercely motivated learners and workers. They wanted to settle, to own stores (many were from merchant cultures, the archetype of an American small business owner), to live on their own paycheck. They need help, but are far from helpless.

This is not what we hear. We see refugees as limp bodies without agency, pushed out of this or that country, scooped up by this or that other one, dumped in this or that city. The philosopher

Hannah Arendt warned us of this trap. An “abstract human being,” she said, “without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion ... loses all significance.”

Listening to Monday’s debate, I wondered whether we haven’t tossed Rutland in the same boat. Poor, floundering, heroin-addicted Rutland. Unable to help others because she cannot seem to help herself. The language of weakness is the same. We regularly turn refugees into abstractions. Here, though, Rutland is verging on abstracting itself. Is this really how this city sees its own?

Refugees do not have glazed empty eyes, and nor do Rutlanders. They are not without agency; to the contrary. Refugees would bring to Rutland an unrivaled determination to become employed, opinionated citizens. In treating them as such, Rutland would itself grow stronger. (For proof closer to home, see the Herald’s July 10 article about refugees in Lewiston, Maine.)

Perhaps these thoughts arrive too late. The letter has been sent. However, if the issue returns, forget moral obligations to the weak. Our obligation here is not one of charity. It is one of political decency, to ourselves and those waiting at our gates. To put Rutland first, make sure Rutland welcomes.

How to put Rutland first

Yvonne Daley is a Rutland resident and former reporter for the Herald.

I’ve been shocked to witness the rancor toward the Syrian refugees and those who support their resettlement in Rutland. It embarrasses me for my city. Rutland is a hardscrabble city built by immigrants, many of whom came here sponsored by others like them who had escaped abuse, war, deprivation, tyranny and discrimination. They knew what some seem to have forgotten, that a place doesn’t prosper without change, challenge, optimism and new people and ideas.

Common sense is important. But inventing worries or whipping them out of proportion is not common sense. Each group of immigrants has had to overcome stereotypes and insults uttered by those who came before them so they could feel superior. It’s always disheartening to hear discrimination uttered by people whose ancestors were discriminated against themselves.

I was also embarrassed for the city by the rudeness of several of the board members toward the representatives from the settlement program at the aldermanic meeting at the Godnick Center. The accusatory tone of voice used by several board members, as well as their grandstanding and rapid-fire questioning felt more like bullying than an attempt to garner “more information.”

It all got me wondering if the American Indians would have let the British colonists come to their country if they’d had a say in the matter.

It’s got me thinking also about my mother who came with her mother and baby brother to

Boston at age 14 from Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, a mining town down on its luck. Her father had been in Boston for two years, building tenement houses for other immigrants and refugees from places where there wasn't enough food or work, places where there had been war, bias and worse.

And that got me thinking about the Jewish immigrants who came to Rutland "in pursuit of their lives, literally running away from death and destruction," as Michael Dwyer described once in a Rutland Historical Society program. What great contributions they brought to their new home.

I've been thinking also of the Sicilian families from Randazzo, those who came first and then sponsored one another to come to a cold, unknown place so different from their village on the apron of Mount Etna. They, like so many other groups of Europeans, made our city a rich, diverse and successful place.

And then I recalled the late "Farmer John" Squire of Tinmouth who, during the boat people crisis, placed an ad in the paper that read something like, "All you politicians and church people, put your money where your mouth is. I will feed one Hmong family for one year if you bring them here and house them." The community did, welcoming people who had lived in refugee camps for years as they made their way to America.

Want to make America great again? Act American.