



# **MINUTES**

## **International Relations Committee**

**Monday, March 11, 2019**

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### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Zach Nunn, Chairperson  
Senator Jeff Edler

Representative Terry C. Baxter, Vice Chairperson  
Representative Ako Abdul-Samad  
Representative Thomas D. Gerhold  
Representative Brian K. Lohse  
Representative Heather Matson

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### **CONTENTS**

- I. Procedural Business**
- II. Intelligence Briefing and Presentation by Iowa National Guard and Iowa Sister States**
- III. Presentation on Refugee Resettlement by Catholic Charities, Lutheran Services in Iowa, and RefugeeRISE**
- IV. Discussion**
- V. Materials Filed With the Legislative Services Agency**



### I. Procedural Business

**Background and Charge.** The International Relations Committee was created by the Legislative Council in 1992. The committee's charge is as follows: Develop goals and procedures that will facilitate international communication between the Iowa General Assembly and foreign governments on several different levels, including but not limited to interpersonal interaction between state legislators and legislative staff and foreign visitors, instruction about state and local democratic institutions, and the development of trade in foreign markets.

**Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Nunn at 11:05 a.m., Monday, March 11, 2019, in Room 22 of the State Capitol Building in Des Moines.

**Minutes.** A draft of the minutes of the February 25, 2019, meeting is available at [www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/meetings/minutes?meetingID=29327](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/meetings/minutes?meetingID=29327).

**Adjournment.** The meeting adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

### II. Intelligence Briefing and Presentation by Iowa National Guard and Iowa Sister States

Ms. Kassi Bailey, International Program Manager, Iowa Sister States (ISS); and Mr. Chad Pickering, Government Relations Officer, Iowa National Guard, briefed members regarding each organization's current and upcoming activities. Ms. Bailey described a collaboration between ISS and Yamanashi Prefecture to bring "Bacon Festival" to Japan, the sister city relationship that will soon be established between Sioux City and Gjilan, Kosovo, and an invitation that committee members will soon receive from ISS to attend a reception to be held on April 4, 2019, for outgoing Consul General Mr. Xhavit Gashi of the Consulate of the Republic of Kosovo. In response to a request, Ms. Bailey indicated she will provide members with data regarding the economic impact of the Blue Ribbon Bacon Festival.

Mr. Pickering provided a deployment update, and indicated there are no new international security concerns with the exception of a security alert issued by the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico regarding visits by U.S. citizens to Mexico during spring break. The alert warns U.S. citizens to avoid consuming unregulated alcohol and Mr. Pickering advised citizens to stay on resort property during their visit to Mexico. He also referred to an article published by the Des Moines Register about an Afghan, Nabi Mohammadi, who took the U.S. Citizenship Oath this month. Mr. Mohammadi served as an interpreter in 2010 and 2011 for the Iowa National Guard, often accompanying guard member patrols through a mountainous area of Afghanistan near the Pakistan border. Mr. Pickering also described a new effort by the Iowa National Guard and other states' guard units to support Kosovo in maintaining Humvees donated to Kosovo by the United States. Under the Iowa National Guard State Partnership Program, Kosovo sends representatives to Iowa for Humvee maintenance training. In response to requests, Mr. Pickering indicated he would provide members with information regarding the U.S. Embassy's security alert, and said he will be reviewing the schedule of airlifts to Kosovo and the military's policy regarding transportation of elected officials on military flights.

### III. Presentation on Refugee Resettlement by Catholic Charities, Lutheran Services in Iowa, and RefugeeRISE

Ms. Elsie Rotich, Program Manager and Resettlement Director, Catholic Charities-Diocese of Des Moines, provided members with an overview of the refugee resettlement efforts and the many organizations involved in resettling refugees in the United States. The goal of the program she directs is to make refugees self-sufficient within the first four months of arrival in the state. Nearly three-quarters



of the arrivals are from the countries of Burma/Myanmar, Bhutan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Arrival numbers, which she noted are determined by each president's administration, have decreased in recent years. She also described the path to citizenship for refugees.

Mr. Nicholas Wuertz, Director of Refugee Services, Lutheran Services in Iowa, provided statistics to illustrate Iowa's refugee efforts. He also noted that the number of refugees entering the U.S. has fallen since 1980 from an average of 80,000 annually to the current ceiling of fewer than 21,000 refugees for 2019, but he observed that the need for refugee resettlement is actually greater. He described resettlement as the option of last resort and noted that the United Nations always looks first at the best option, returning refugees to their homes. Iowa's success in resettling refugees is better than the national average. In return, refugees bring life to Iowa's communities. Most refugees must sign a promissory note agreeing to repay their travel costs to come to Iowa. Lutheran Services in Iowa provides a host of assistance refugees need to attain self-sufficiency, including job training, job retraining, mental health services, financial literacy, help locating childcare, and help establishing licensed in-home childcare and family farm businesses.

Ms. Layla Younis, Program Coordinator, EMBARC-RefugeeRISE, and Mr. Tin Lia, WorkReady Navigator, EMBARC-RefugeeRISE, described the services provided by RefugeeRISE, an Americorps program. The program provides refugee services from 12 sites located throughout Iowa. The program partners with nonprofit organizations, including Goodwill, to provide services such as English-as-a-Second-Language assistance, employment, and health care services to move refugees toward self-sufficiency. The program also works with employment agencies and employers. The program serves both refugee and nonrefugee populations. Program leaders would like to expand the number of sites and partner with other cities through the state. Responding to a question regarding background checks, Ms. Younis noted that there are nine different federal agencies involved with refugee background checks and they cross-reference their findings. Health screenings are also conducted. Then the U.S. Department of State determines whether and where the refugee might have family living in the U.S., and whether there are caseworkers in the community who can help with the refugee's resettlement.

#### **IV. Discussion**

Chairperson Nunn distributed a draft of a Senate resolution in support of strengthening and deepening the relationship between Taiwan and the State of Iowa and invited Senators to co-sponsor the resolution. He also shared a draft of a resolution recognizing March 14, 2019, as Japan Day at the Iowa State Capitol. He asked if any member opposed either resolution; none voiced opposition.

#### **V. Materials Filed With the Legislative Services Agency**

Materials distributed at or in connection with the meeting are filed with the Legislative Services Agency and may be accessed from the "Committee Documents" link on the committee's Internet Site at:

[www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/meetings/documents?committee=661&ga=ALL](http://www.legis.iowa.gov/committees/meetings/documents?committee=661&ga=ALL)

1. PowerPoint for Intelligence Briefing by Iowa National Guard and Iowa Sister States.
2. Refugee Resettlement PowerPoint — Catholic Charities-Diocese of Des Moines (CC-DSM).
3. U.S. Refugee Admissions Program infosheet — CC-DSM.
4. Rigorous Security Screening infosheet — U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops — CC-DSM.
5. Security Screening of Refugees infosheet — U.S.C.R.I. — CC-DSM.



## International Relations Committee

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6. Iowa Refugee Statistics/The Path to Resettlement — Iowa Lutheran Services handout.
7. RefugeeRISE/Americorps infocard.
8. Email to Committee Members from Chad Pickering.