MARK KIRK
ILLINOIS

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AGING

United States Senate

November 16, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We stand in solidarity with the people of France and against the terrorists who carried out the horrific attacks of November 13th that clearly were designed deliberately to kill as many innocent people as possible. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families. As we mourn the loss of life and provide France all the support and assistance it needs, the U.S. government must redouble its efforts to keep the American people safe. We believe that an essential component of that effort is ensuring that no refugee related to the Syrian crisis is admitted to the United States unless the U.S. government can guarantee, with 100 percent assurance, that they are not members, supporters, or sympathizers of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Daesh or ISIL.

It is already clear that ISIS is responsible for the barbaric attacks. Reports indicate that at least one of the attackers apparently utilized the flow of refugees to infiltrate into Europe. These facts require a serious and objective reexamination of the Administration's policy toward Syrian refugees to avoid unnecessary risks.

While our country has a long history of welcoming refugees and has an important role to play in the heartbreaking Syrian refugee crisis, our first and most important priority must be to ensure that any refugee who comes to the United States does not present a threat to the American people. Compassion for Syrian refugees is important, but a fierce determination to protect the American people is also important.

The fact that ISIS may have utilized the flow of refugees to infiltrate Europe and potentially the United States is not a surprise. In September, the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), James Clapper, publicly warned the U.S. intelligence community has a "huge concern" that ISIS may seek to infiltrate Syrian refugees who are flowing into Europe and potentially the United States. "As they [refugees] descend on Europe, one of the obvious issues that we worry about, and in turn as we bring refugees into this country, is exactly what's their background?" DNI Clapper added: "We don't obviously put it past the likes of ISIL to infiltrate operatives among these refugees."

On October 21, 2015, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director James Comey told the House Committee on Homeland Security that the U.S. government may not have the ability to vet thoroughly all Syrian refugees coming into the United States. He explained that if a Syrian person is not already in

CHICAGO OFFICE
230 SOUTH DEARBORN ST.
SUITE 3900
CHICAGO, IL 60604
312-886-3506

SPRINGFIELD OFFICE
607 EAST ADAMS ST.
SUITE 1520
SPRINGFIELD, IL 62701
217-492-5089

WASHINGTON OFFICE
524 HART BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
202-224-2854

www.kirk.senate.gov

the FBI's database, that person is unknown to the agency, leaving an inadequate basis for the person's background to be screened for terrorism risk. "We can only query against that which we have collected," Director Comey cautioned. He also said, "So if someone has never made a ripple in the pond in Syria in a way that would get their identity or their interest reflected in our database, we can query our database until the cows come home but we are not going to—there will be nothing … because we have no record on that person."

Given DNI Clapper's stated concern that ISIS may try to infiltrate Syrian refugee movements as well as FBI Director Comey's public acknowledgment of the U.S. government's limitations in thoroughly vetting all Syrian refugees, we respectfully request your Administration:

- List comprehensively the challenges, prior to the November 13th terrorist attacks, in the process for checking the background of Syrian refugees and checking potential risks to national security, including potential terrorism risks;

- Detail what special or enhanced measures will be added to the screening process for Syrian refugees in the aftermath of the November 13th terrorist attacks; and

- Describe how it plans to address the vetting challenges that Director Comey describes.

We ask that your Administration immediately share this information with the American people. We look forward to a timely response. We cannot imagine a more urgent or higher priority.

Sincerely,

Mark Kirk
United States Senator

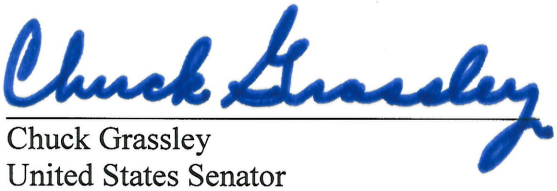
Kelly Ayotte
United States Senator

Joni Ernst
United States Senator

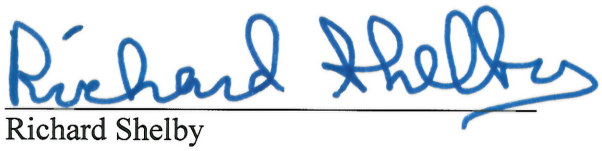
Daniel Coats
United States Senator

Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator

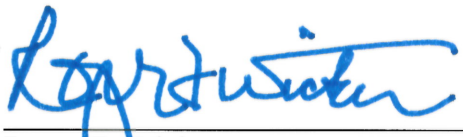
Joe Manchin
United States Senator



Chuck Grassley
United States Senator



Richard Shelby
United States Senator



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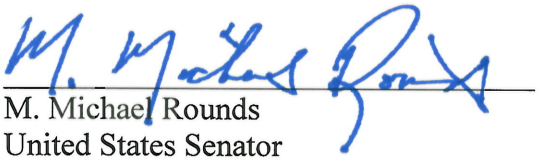

M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator