

Ron Brantsner says volunteer agencies //targeting Minnesota for illegal immigrant and refugee resettlement

NOTE - THE EDITOR BELOW IS VERY SLANTED LEFT BUT SOME GOOD INFO HERE FROM RONS' TALK :

**By Terry Lehrke, */News Editor/*

Ron Brantsner, with the former Minutemen Civil Defense volunteer border watch group, was in Little Falls July 23. He was invited to the area to speak about how corporations and volunteer agencies bring illegal immigrants and refugees to Minnesota as a form of "slavery," to do jobs Americans wouldn't do, for low wages.

Brantsner, formerly of Minnesota, now has a residence in California.

Invited by "a gentleman out of Little Falls," Brantsner said, "I don't contact anybody. People reach out to me. I don't go solicit this, I don't get paid for this, I don't belong to any organizations.

"When I get invited, I'm a normal everyday citizen just livin' the dream," he said.

Brantsner told the group that with funding from the federal government, the volunteer agencies or "Volags" as he called them, had targeted Minnesota because of the generous welfare benefits in the state. The targeted areas were those where poultry processing plants, and meat packing plants were located, he said.

Brantsner said once illegal immigrants and refugees move into a community, its Social Services, health care and educational resources are overwhelmed, with counties and taxpayers footing the tax burden.

Most of his information, Brantsner said, he gets from the Internet – websites of the Lutheran Social Services and Catholic Charities websites, he said are two of the "Volags" who receive federal funding and are instrumental in resettlement of immigrants and refugees.

The federal funding depends, Brantsner said, on working with immigrants and refugees.

Brantsner mainly spoke of the Blandin Foundation being a funding organization, but noted the McKnight Foundation was also involved.

He pointed out the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls has ties to the McKnight Foundation.

Don Hickman, vice president for community and economic development with the Initiative Foundation in Little Falls said, "Apparently that's been a rumor that's been around Morrison County for a couple of years," in reference to the Initiative Foundation being involved in the settlement of immigrants and refugees.

"At one point the version I had heard was that the Pope was asking us to bring more Muslims to the area," said Hickman. "The short answer, is 'No, we're not involved in any direct resettlement.'

"We are aware that many employers are struggling to find skilled workers and we welcome the opportunity to help any employer with worker training, that sort of thing, but we don't have any strategy to bring a specific sect or sector into Morrison County, and I can't imagine why we ever would," Hickman said.

"I think that this got started because several faith communities like Lutheran Social Services and Catholic Charities have worked with refugee resettlement and while they are grantees of ours at times – we're not directly funding that activity, but I think that's the link that got our name associated with it," Hickman said.

Hickman said the Initiative Foundation gets asked the question fairly often, and while the organization is "absolutely non-discriminatory" it doesn't have a strategy or policy where it is trying to tell any community who they should or shouldn't provide housing or other services to, he said.

Hickman said the only federal support the Initiative Foundation gets is from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), "which requires we work in rural, low income communities," he said. "They're about the best friend rural Minnesota has, because there are not too many funders for low-income rural communities. There are no requirements for mandatory engagement with refugees or immigrants."

Fred Festler of Little Falls said people were invited to the meeting by word of mouth.

"I think there's a fear of Somalis coming to Little Falls, we've heard rumors," Fred said. "I've found out too, they like to bring Somalis in where there's more industry, where they can work. Like a farmer hires them at \$15 – he pays \$10 and the government pays the other \$5."

His wife, Kathy Festler, noted Brantsner said the immigrants/refugees would probably not come to this area for the jobs. "It would be more for housing than anything," she said.

"That's probably again more speculation – I found his talk a bit hard to follow – he would generalize and jump into another subject," Kathy said. "Basically to me it was how entwined it was with grant groups, corporations and government. He talked also about these Blandin Foundation and the McKnight Foundation. It wasn't real clear, they're grant-making companies, they produce grants for cities and individuals and businesses and so forth – they evidently are involved in funneling money for groups."

Kathy said what local residents can start to do is go to their county commissioners to ask that the county keep detailed records "to keep track of numbers and costs – they have to have good record-keeping once this starts," she said.

Kathy said she found what Brantsner said, "excited people. ... They talked about maybe things that stuck with them a little, it's what people do with it when they get it. If they don't research it or follow it more, what good is it? ... Those people that went to that meeting are at least aware. ... Maybe these people will wake up and stand behind something. That's my point. We have to have some say and control in the matter. We can't just have them move in on us."

She said cities or counties have to consider the increased costs.

"Their income is going to go down and their costs are going to go up and they're not going to be able to function," Kathy said.

John Salmon, a resident who heard about the meeting third or fourth hand, said he came to "see what a bunch of outraged people looked like.

"People upset with the Somalian invasion of our end of Little Falls is the

problem a lot of the people that were there had," Salmon said. He lives near the new development approved in the city near DeRosier Drive.

"It was just a lot of people – that guy was a colossal bore," Salmon said. "I'm not outraged about what he said only because he was so simple-minded about it – I don't think he knew what he was talking about."

Brantsner told the group that if refugees were resettled to the city of Little Falls, residents likely wouldn't know, because it is all done "in stealth."

He told them to call the school district to see whether refugees or immigrants had enrolled as one way to find out.

Little Falls Supt. Stephen Jones said Tuesday he wasn't aware of any immigrant or refugee families enrolling at this point. "However, the big registration time for new families in the district is traditionally in August. But as of right now, I know of none," he said.

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