

EDITORIAL

Countering terrorism by building a path to success

Fundraising shouldn't fall short for Cedar-Riverside jobs center.

By Editorial Board Star Tribune

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JOEL KOYAMA • STAR TRIBUNE Minneapolis' Cedar-Riverside neighborhood will be the location for the Opportunity Center, once the final fundraising amount is raised.

An extra emotional punch came with the Aug. 24 filing of federal charges against Mohamed Roble for aiding the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The 20-year-old from Minneapolis isn't just the 11th man from the Twin Cities area charged with aiding the brutal Middle East terrorist group: He's also one of the children injured on a school bus when the I-35W bridge collapsed on a hot summer night in 2007.

That Roble was rescued from the bridge nightmare only to allegedly become prey to ISIL recruiters is tragic and unsettling. Roble had a bright future in his new homeland. Yet he still apparently succumbed to the deceitful promises of those who lure young men like him to senseless deaths in the sands of Syria.

The charges are yet another reminder that Minnesota can't sit idly by as ISIL recruiters continue their despicable work here and Congress dithers in funding community programs to counter violent extremism.

While state lawmakers and local governments are helping to plug the gap, one important new initiative — a jobs center in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis — still needs a relatively small but urgent boost to meet a fundraising goal.

The Opportunity Center, as it's known, will be located just across the street from the Brian Coyle Community Center in the heart of the densely populated area near downtown Minneapolis that is home to many of state's Somali-Americans. The public-private initiative's mission of creating "pathways" to employment with local large employers, such as Fairview Health Services, fits well into the state's pragmatic strategy of building community resilience. Young people firmly connected to their new home, such as through jobs or through friendships and interests forged in other programs, will be less likely to hear and heed terrorists' call to jihad.

The Legislature missed an opportunity this year to provide \$400,000 to help launch the Opportunity Center. The funding had been approved this spring but it was in the tax bill that didn't get signed due to political wrangling over a special session. Thankfully, a key project champion, the Cedar-Riverside Partnership, didn't quit working on raising the \$950,000 necessary to open the center.

Sizable donations from the McKnight Foundation, the Pohlada Family Foundation, the Otto Bremer Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation have helped put the Cedar-Riverside Partnership tantalizingly close to the fundraising goal. That support is especially welcome after a decade of dwindling grants for Somali community support in the state. An April 24 editorial noted that annual philanthropic support for Somali initiatives had dropped by 86 percent from 2004 to 2014.

The city of Minneapolis also contributed to the jobs center. The project is now just \$25,000 short of what's needed. Time is urgent because Hennepin County, which also committed \$250,000, will sign a 10-year lease once the entire sum is raised. The sooner the goal is met, the sooner the center's important work can begin.

The jobs center is a practical step that will boost security now and benefit the state in the long-run by strengthening its workforce. Funding the remaining amount is eminently doable in a state that is home to respected philanthropies and successful, community-minded companies.