

Carol Marin: Michigan restaurant owner is no terrorist

Written By Tom McNamee Posted: 10/16/2015, 04:29pm



Ibrahim Parlak |

Carol Marin photo

Will Ibrahim Parlak's torture ever end?

On Nov. 3, he is once again ordered to report to U.S immigration authorities in Detroit for questioning.

He fears what's coming.

Is there some unforgiving functionary deep in the bowels of the federal bureaucracy who will never accept that Homeland Security screwed up in fingering this decent man for deportation in the first place?

I've written about Ibrahim since 2005. He is the owner of a Middle Eastern restaurant, Cafe Gulistan, in the Michigan resort town of Harbert.

A Turkish Kurd by birth, he was on the side of the separatists back when the U.S. didn't love Turkey. In the early 90's he was imprisoned and tortured by the Turkish government. He won asylum in the U.S. And by all accounts he was a model citizen, taxpayer, and job creator.

Then came 9/11.

And the War on Terror.

All of a sudden, the terror was his.

The U.S. switched its affections in favor of Turkey. And Ibrahim, thanks to geniuses in Washington, was labeled a terrorist and jailed for 10 months.

He is not a terrorist.

Don't take my word for it.

Don't even take the word of former senator Carl Levin, (D-Michigan) who, until he retired in January, repeatedly introduced private bills in the Senate to stave off Ibrahim's deportation.

Take the word of John Smietanka, the former United States attorney for Western Michigan, appointed by presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Smietanka is one of Ibrahim's many lawyers working at discounted fees or no fees at all.

Take the word of Anne Buckleitner, former counsel to the FBI in areas of counter-intelligence and terrorism and another member of Ibrahim's legal team.

Listen to Michigan Congressman Fred Upton, a Republican, who, in bipartisan agreement with Levin, saw the immense injustice being done to Ibrahim and for the last decade has fought valiantly to stop it.

"I believe in Ibrahim," Upton told me Friday. "He has lived a superb life. He is the epitome of what this country believes in."

At 53, Ibrahim Parlak is a slight man with a quiet manner and a palpable burden. The Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has all but issued him a ball and chain. He must return their phone calls within three minutes. He has had to drive six hours round trip to Detroit for mandatory meetings that often last only minutes.

Mysteriously, bank after bank has told him to take his business elsewhere. Even when all he seeks to do is DEPOSIT money.

Do they explain?

"No," he replies. "Never."

Homeland Security has ordered Ibrahim to apply for residency to some other country. He shows me 73 registered letters to nations from Armenia to Togo. They've all said no. If the U.S. government wants him out, why would they let him in?

Since Levin retired, no U.S. Senator has joined with Upton in support of a private bill to block Ibrahim's deportation.

Short of a presidential pardon, it is Ibrahim's only hope against the inexplicable tyranny of our own government.

And so, once again, I write the same two words.

Free Ibrahim.