

Transcribed Excerpt from "Most Iowans Oppose More Boat People" Des Moines Register Article, September 30, 1979

... Survey Results

The survey representatives of all the state's adults, reveals the following

- There is no difference between Iowans' views on bringing the refugees to Iowa and bringing them to the United States. Both are disapproved of by a 5-to-4 margins.
- Only about one of every 10 Iowans thinks this nation should increase the numbers of Indochinese it is willing to admit. By contrast, roughly one of three believes it should admit "no boat people" at all.
- The largest group (38 percent) doesn't think the boat people will have a marked impact on the communities in which they settle. But 29 percent of Iowans believe the newcomers will damage the quality of life in those cities and Iowans; 23 percent think they'll improve it.
- Education has a profound effect on all the poll results. For instance, 60 percent of college-educated persons approve of resettling the refugees in Iowa. That sentiment is shared only by 13 percent of those who did not graduate from high school.

More Welcoming

In real terms, Iowa's reaction to the refugee crisis has been more welcoming than the opinions expressed in the poll.

Since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, 3,843 Indochinese have found homes here — one refugee for every 749 Iowans. Of all the nations in the world, according to the governor's office, only Australia has taken in more refugees per person than has Iowa. Of all the states in the nation, only eight others (most of them in milder climates) rank ahead of Iowa.

Whether it's despite that record or because of it, the poll shows Iowans who disapprove of the resettlement have a variety of reasons for doing so.

The most common response is that there are plenty of needy Iowans who deserve first consideration. After that come two conflicting answers: That the refugees take job away from the others and that the refugees are too expensive to support.

Entry-level Jobs

Ray has heard those arguments before in angry letters to his office. But he dismisses all three with the contention that the refugees are industrious and willing to take entry-level jobs that others don't want.

"Here in Iowa," he notes, "we don't have a growing population. And as we attract new businesses and jobs, we can take new people. We have a very low unemployment rate." The governor said that the national leadership of the AFL-CIO and the Iowa leadership of the United Auto Workers have supported refugee resettlement.

But the poll suggests that support does not prevail among labor's rank and file.

The state's blue collar workers solidly disapprove of bringing the Indochinese here (31 percent yes, 62 percent no). But white collar workers solidly approve (54 percent yes, 37 percent no).

Ray still asserted the lowans "do have a heart" after learning of the poll's findings.

"Forty percent say we can handle it," he noted. "And I would say that many of those who are voting on the negative side, if it were explained to them and fully understood, would reach out too. Their reaction is an expected one ... But you don't take care of your own problems by never taking care of others."

The poll shows most lowans who approve of admitting the boat people feel that admissions should continue at current levels and not be increased.

Most of those who disapprove say there should be no boat people settling here. However, a third of them say current admissions should be allowed down rather than stopped.