

1 Hearing on
2 H.R. 2816 - Refugee Legislation

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4 THURSDAY, MAY 24, 1979

5 U. S. House of Representatives,
6 Committee on the Judiciary,
7 Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees,
8 and International Law,
9 Washington, D. C.

10 The subcommittee met at 10:45 a.m. in room 2237 of the
11 Rayburn House Office Building; the Honorable Elizabeth Holtzman,
12 chairperson of the subcommittee, presiding.

13 Present: Representatives Holtzman, Harris, Fish, Butler,
14 and Lungren.

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1 Ms. Holtzman. The subcommittee will commence the
2 final day of hearings on legislation that I, along with Chairman
3 Peter Rodino, have introduced on behalf of the Carter
4 administration.

5 We are very proud today to hear from several state
6 governments and, in particular, the governor of Iowa, the
7 Honorable Robert Ray, who will be accompanied by a representa-
8 tive of Michigan's governor, the Honorable William Milliken.

9 I would like to congratulate Governor Ray on what I
10 understand is a very successful refugee resettlement program
11 in Iowa, and his active involvement in the program.

12 Clearly the success of the effort depends in large
13 part on the leadership and personal initiative of the governor
14 and his staff, as well as those responsible in the various
15 resettlement communities.

16 I hope this legislation will serve to establish more
17 permanent legislation to ensure more successful resettlement
18 and better cooperation between federal and state governments.

19 We now invite Governor Ray to come forward. We understand
20 Congressman Jim Leach will introduce him to the committee.

21 Congressman Leach, we are very pleased to have you here.
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1 STATEMENT OF HONORABLE ROBERT D. RAY, GOVERNOR OF
2 IOWA; accompanied by JOYCE SAVALE, JAMES JORDAN,
3 SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO HONORABLE WILLIAM G. MILLIKEN,
4 GOVERNOR OF MICHIGAN, and KENNETH QUINN.

5 Mr. Leach. Thank you.

6 Madam Chairwoman, I am very pleased to introduce to the
7 subcommittee Governor Ray. Iowa has the most comprehensive
8 and probably successful refugee program of any state in the
9 country. This past January I had the privilege to visit
10 Northeast Thailand and met many of those from whose groups
11 the majority of refugees in Iowa come. I visited particularly
12 five or six families who were making final preparations to
13 come to Iowa.

14 On behalf of the state and governor, I conveyed to these
15 families our respect for their goals and the state of Iowa's
16 desire to help. I will never forget the statement of one of
17 the leaders who said, "Yes, Governor Ray, I hear good things
18 about him from my cousin in Des Moines."

19 I would like to stress that people around the world are
20 hearing good things about Governor Robert Ray. He is the senior
21 elected administrative leader in America today. He's combined
22 a unique blend of fiscal conservatism with basic human
23 compassion.

24 Not only has he taken the lead in the governors'
25 conferences in the refugee issue, he's taken the lead on the

1 governors' conference on the D.C. voting rights bill.

2 We feel strongly that we should not have a disenfranchised
3 group of people in this country.

4 We should also have a country where people are welcome.
5 This is a country of immigrants.

6 With that, I would like to introduce Governor Ray.

7 Ms. Holtzman. Thank you very much, Congressman Leach.

8 Governor Ray, we are again very happy to have you here
9 and to hear your testimony.

10 Governor Ray. Madam Chairwoman, thank you very much.

11 Jim Leach, thank you. It is very generous, your comments.

12 I am pleased to have this opportunity to come before you
13 today to comment on H.R. 2816, a bill to revise this
14 country's refugee policy and to provide you with some
15 information about Iowa's refugee resettlement program.

16 I would like to introduce to you those who are accompanying
17 me today.

18 First, to my right and to your left, is Mr. James Jordan,
19 who is the executive assistant to Governor William Milliken
20 of Michigan. Mr. Jordan is here as a personal representative
21 of Governor Milliken, and with your permission would like
22 to read a statement from the governor on this particular
23 issue following my testimony.

24 To my left, on the other side of Congressman Leach, is
25 Mr. Kenneth Quinn, a career Foreign Service Officer assigned

1 to my office under the Pearson Program. Mr. Quinn worked on the
2 refugee program while serving at the National Security Council
3 and State Department, and now acts as my principal staff
4 representative on this subject.

5 Colleen Shearer, who is the head of the Iowa Department
6 of Job Services and Director of the Iowa Refugee Service
7 Center, had planned to be with me today, but was unable to
8 be present. Ms. Shearer has been the driving force behind
9 the Iowa program since its inception in 1975.

10 At the outset, I want to state unequivocally that I
11 attach great importance to the work in which you are involved.

12 The plight of the people fleeing Communism in Indochina
13 is truly a momentous question facing the Congress and the
14 American people. Human lives are at stake. Already hundreds,
15 if not thousands -- the majority women and children -- have
16 perished at sea.

17 Our need to come to the aid of these people is the main
18 reason I come before you today. Our response to this problem
19 will to a large degree determine whether more lives are lost
20 or saved.

21 I fully realize that you, Madam Chairwoman, and the
22 members of this committee are acutely aware of the gravity of
23 this issue. The concern you and Representative Fish exhibited
24 for the plight of these unfortunate people and your efforts
25 to discern the level of their suffering during your recent

1 trip to Southeast Asia are well known to many of us.

2 I also believe it is important for your committee to have
3 input from the states on the matter of refugee resettlement.
4 For, while it is the President and the Attorney General who
5 decide to admit the refugees, and the Congress that appropriates
6 the money to move them here, it is ultimately the states which
7 receive them.

8 We -- and here I am referring to both the public and
9 private sectors -- are responsible for educating, employing
10 and caring for them. We therefore have accumulated a great deal
11 of experience which should be useful to you in your delibera-
12 tions.

13 With that in mind, let me turn to our experiences in
14 Iowa and briefly outline the history and direction of our
15 program. The story of refugee resettlement in Iowa began in
16 July 1975 when the administration in Washington indicated
17 that refugees were not being resettled as quickly as they
18 were moving into camps.

19 President Ford asked the nation's governors what we
20 might do to aid in this process. We determined that we could
21 be of help and I decided that the state of Iowa would become
22 a primary agency for resettlement and authorized our entry
23 into a contract with the State Department.

24 The next step was to locate the refugees to come to
25 Iowa. Through Iowans working in one of the refugee camps,

1 we learned of a community of people -- perhaps a tribe would
2 be a better word -- known as the Tai Dam or Black Tai. There
3 were approximately 1400 of these mountain people who had lived
4 in the highlands of Vietnam and China for generations, but who
5 had fled to Laos in 1954 after the Communist takeover of
6 Hanoi.

7 After careful consideration we decided we would bring
8 the Tai Dam to Iowa. By accepting them as a group -- what is
9 referred to as a cluster resettlement -- we hoped to achieve
10 several goals:

11 First, we felt the Tai Dam's cultural heritage and social
12 structure could be preserved if they were resettled in one
13 area. Otherwise, they faced dispersal to all parts of the
14 United States with little chance of maintaining their identity.

15 Secondly, keeping their ethnic and tribal structure
16 intact, we felt, would provide a mutually reinforcing support
17 system as the refugees made the difficult adjustment to a
18 new culture.

19 I am happy to report to you that both of those goals were
20 achieved and the resettlement of the Tai Dam has been beyond
21 expectation. These people have become productive,
22 contributing members of our society, paying taxes and earning
23 their own way. A survey recently conducted indicated that
24 over one-third of the families are purchasing their own homes.
25 There has been little need for welfare assistance and all

1 seeking work are gainfully employed.

2 We are pleased with this record and I would like to take
3 just a moment to outline some of the salient points which
4 contributed to it.

5 Great credit for this performance must go to the
6 sponsors, those Iowans who voluntarily came forward to accept
7 the moral commitment of helping a refugee family start anew.
8 Without their selfless devotion and giving, this would not
9 have been possible. The sponsors were and remain the first
10 crucial ingredient in any resettlement effort.

11 A second factor on which I place considerable emphasis
12 is the "job orientation" we gave to the refugee program.
13 As I mentioned earlier, Ms. Shearer, the director of the Iowa
14 program, is also the head of our Department of Job Service.
15 We have endeavored to establish close ties between these agencies.

16 For example, we have hired specialists to work both in
17 our Refugee Service Center and in the Job Service Department
18 to counsel the refugees on employment and to help them find
19 jobs.

20 This linkage has been invaluable in creating a work
21 climate rather than a welfare climate, as I understand has
22 occurred in many other areas.

23 I cannot overemphasize the importance I attach to
24 inculcating these new arrivals with a work ethic -- not
25 really hard to do, inasmuch as that has been their custom in

1 the past. But like anyone else, they are susceptible to the
2 pernicious temptation of something for nothing. We cannot
3 claim 100 percent effectiveness, but our low cash assistance
4 figures for the Tai Dam over the past four years testifies
5 to the efficacy of this approach.

6 A third factor in our success has been the outreach work
7 done by the caseworkers of our Refugee Service Center. Once a
8 refugee is transferred to his or her sponsor, we do not consider
9 our obligation ended.

10 In fact, we considered follow-up to be an essential
11 part of the resettlement process. By maintaining this
12 relatively small and inexpensive office, the refugee knows he or
13 she always has a place to turn for help and assistance, if
14 needed; and we have a way of following that person's progress
15 and the capability to step in with guidance and counseling,
16 should that need arise.

17 I would be remiss if I did not also mention at this
18 point the valuable work being done in Iowa, and across the
19 country, by the voluntary agencies who have resettled the
20 majority of the refugees in the country. We enjoy a close
21 working relationship with these groups who have done so much
22 for the refugee program.

23 Finally, of course, we must recognize the refugees
24 themselves. They are the ones who must struggle to make
25 the adjustment. They are the ones who must work the long hours

1 mostly at entry level wages. They are the ones who must
2 endure the difficulties that all immigrants undergo. In the
3 final analysis, our success is their success, and vice versa.

4 It was based on this initial success that we considered
5 taking further action last December to assist the "boat
6 people" who were fleeing Vietnam in increasing numbers by sea,
7 often in frail boats unsuited for such an arduous journey.
8 Because the refugees were arriving at a far faster rate
9 than we and other free world countries were accepting them,
10 local Malaysian officials began pushing boats back out to sea.

11 Some of them broke up under the merciless pounding of
12 the waves and in one short period over 400 people drowned.
13 Thousands of others -- the lucky ones -- are languishing in
14 camps such as the little strip of sand beach at Pulau
15 Bidong, which has been dubbed the "Island of the Hopeless."
16 This suffering was brought vividly home to me in a
17 television documentary prepared by CBS newsman Ed Bradley
18 which aired on January 16.

19 After watching it, I saw that we really only had
20 two choices: we could either turn our backs as countless
21 others suffered and died, or we could extend a hand to help,
22 and in so doing prevent tragic loss of innocent lives.

23 Actually, I saw only one real choice. I wrote to
24 President Carter January 17, informing him that Iowa would
25 resettle an additional 1500 refugees during this year. In this