

Ensuring Security and Preserving American Virtues

The highest priority of any government is to ensure the safety and security of our citizens. While protecting, we must preserve the virtues that make America a beacon of hope and optimism in the world.

The heart wrenching tragedies in Paris, as well as horrific acts of domestic terrorism, remind us the incredibly difficult work of ensuring public safety is never done. States must work closely with our federal partners, and each other, in this constant effort.

Governors, for their part, must make decisions that they believe will help preserve their state's security. That includes pausing resettlement programs until they can verify that the federal government is applying the highest possible security standards to those who seek refuge here. I believe Vermont too should press the pause button until a national security solution is established and the federal government can prove, and state law enforcement can verify, that all applicants are adequately screened for security purposes. The federal government must also fully fund these programs.

When the Federal government can provide absolute certainty for Americans' safety and provide much-needed resources, we can then open our doors, and our hearts, to those in need. Turning our backs on the children and families forced to flee any humanitarian crisis is inconsistent with our values as a nation.

Terrorism is intended to frighten and incite an anger that divides us from each other and our core American values. We can't allow these emotions to scare us into denying help to peaceful, law-abiding people. Surrendering these American principles will hand the terrorists a victory and a recruiting tool.

Yes, we have homelessness, poverty and violence here at home. But the capacity and compassion of America, in my opinion, is deep enough and strong enough to address all of these needs. Certainly not overnight, but definitely over time. These challenges should never be an excuse for fulfilling all of our obligations, not just those that ease our fears, as Americans.

President Ronald Reagan frequently spoke of America as the world's "shining city on a hill." In his farewell to the nation, he said: "...it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, windswept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still."

A portion of what is engraved on the Statue of Liberty is a reminder of that fact, as follows:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

As difficult as it might seem to some, it is appropriate to pause refugee resettlement programs to ensure we are welcoming the peaceful in search of freedom, hope and opportunity. But we also must remember we will not win the War on Terror by surrendering our core American values.

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