

Security That Protects Our Values

In this time of intense emotion, we must keep a level head, respect everyone's concerns, refrain from rushing to judgment, avoid politicizing the issue and remember what unites us as Americans.

It has been inaccurately suggested that I oppose the resettlement of refugees in Vermont. These claims are based on one news story that reported only one part of my view on a complex issue. I want to set the record straight.

First, I believe the first responsibility of any government is to keep its citizens safe. Many Americans fear, in the wake of the attacks in Paris, that our national security is at risk. It heightened the concern that terrorists seek to, and can, exploit the refugee crisis to gain access to targets. With this information in mind, verifying the integrity of the security process of the American refugee program -- and explaining it to Americans -- is a reasonable course of action. Simply dismissing concerns by saying the program is "rigorous" without explaining precisely how it is structured and how it works to ensure security only adds to concerns and adds fuel to the political fire. I believe security has to come first. Whether you agree with that or not is up to you.

Second, I want to be clear that my goal is to ensure the federal program moves forward with security protocols Vermonters, and all Americans, can have confidence in. We are a nation of immigrants -- nearly everyone's family came from somewhere else. Vermont's own history has been enriched by welcoming those who come here seeking a peaceful, prosperous life. For months, I was the only official openly calling for more legal immigration to Vermont to help address our demographic challenges.

The reality is, the recipe for making America a better, stronger, more prosperous nation has always included welcoming peaceful people who share our commitment to the American ideals of freedom and liberty. History proves that legal immigration of freedom-loving people lifts us up and moves us forward.

To those, including many in my party, who say we need to focus on our challenges here at home, I say: You're right. We have homelessness, poverty and violence. But the capacity and compassion of America is deep enough and strong enough to address these needs. Certainly not overnight, but definitely over time.

Through all of this, we mustn't forget that terrorism is intended to frighten us and incite anger that divides us. Judging by the media coverage and the tone of the political dialogue on social media, it's working. We cannot allow this. We cannot allow them to scare us into denying help to peaceful, law-abiding people in need. And we cannot let them define our values.

President Ronald Reagan frequently spoke of America as the world's "shining city on a hill," imagery first invoked, he noted, by a Pilgrim seeking refuge on our shores. In his farewell to the nation, he said that city is "...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 these core values, as well:

"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!"

It is a dangerous, complicated time and the crisis in the Middle East is complex issue. But when the American people are satisfied with the federal security protocols, we should continue to welcome those in search of the hope and opportunity that America offers.

We must always remain that beacon of freedom and hope.

We must always be the world's shining city on the hill.