

Ensure Security and Preserve American Values

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

As the horrific and heart wrenching tragedies in Paris and other acts of terrorism remind us, the 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 call on the federal government to take steps which they believe will help preserve their state's security.

I believe a key problem in this divisive debate is a lack of understanding and information about the refugee resettlement program. I don't say this to imply that the program isn't working; I have full confidence that it does, but by building public understanding, trust is gained. To ease the fears felt by many Americans, I believe the federal government must provide public education about the program, demonstrating how all applicants are adequately screened for security purposes. Knowing now that terrorists are exploiting the humanitarian crisis in Syria and Europe to access targets, this is a reasonable request of the federal government.

I want to be very clear, however, that when the federal government can demonstrate it is meeting its national security obligations we should open our doors, and our hearts, to a reasonable number of those in need. Welcoming children and families forced to flee war, oppression or profound natural disasters is a core value of our great nation, and Vermont has a long, proud history of supporting, and benefiting from, this effort.

We mustn't forget that terrorism is intended to frighten us and incite anger that divides us. We cannot allow them to scare us into denying help to peaceful, law-abiding people in need. And we cannot let terrorists define our values. Surrendering our commitment to help others, when we know it can be done safely, only hands the terrorists a victory and a recruiting tool.

To those who say we need to address our own challenges first, I offer these thoughts: You're right. 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. Our work to make America a better, stronger, more prosperous nation includes welcoming all peaceful people who share our commitment to the American ideals of freedom and liberty. And history proves that legal immigration of peaceful, freedom-loving people lifts us up and moves us forward.

President Ronald Reagan frequently spoke of America as the world's "shining city on a hill." It was an image first invoked, he noted, by a Pilgrim seeking refuge on our shores. 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 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 complicated time and the crisis in the Middle East is a complicated issue. But once the American people are walked through the federal security protocols, we should once again welcome those in search of the hope and opportunity that America offers.

We must never surrender our core American values for any reason – certainly not fear. We must always remain that beacon of freedom and hope. We must always be the world's shining city on the hill.

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