

Ensure Security and Preserve American Values

The highest priority of any government is to ensure the safety and security of its citizens.

While protecting our nation, and our states, we must also preserve the virtues that make America a beacon of hope and optimism in the world.

The heart wrenching tragedies in Paris, as well as other horrific 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 make decisions that they believe will help preserve their state's security.

I believe Vermont should pause its refugee resettlement program until the federal government can demonstrate, and state law enforcement can verify, that all applicants are adequately screened for security purposes.

When the federal government can prove it is meeting its national security obligations we should open our doors, and our hearts, to those in need. Welcoming children and families forced to flee a humanitarian crisis is consistent with the history and values of our great nation.

Terrorism is intended to frighten and incite an anger that divides us from each other and our core American values. We cannot allow them to scare us into denying help to peaceful, law-abiding people. Surrendering our principles hands 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. 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.

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 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!"

Knowing now that terrorists are exploiting a humanitarian crisis to access targets, it is appropriate to pause resettlement programs and require the federal government to verify that it is meeting its national security obligations.

When we have confidence in these 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. We must always remain that shining city on the hill.

###