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Columnist

No Matter Trump's Agenda, Refugees Remain Welcome in New York City (/columnists/other/130-opinion/9097-no-matter-trump-s-agenda-refugees-remain-welcome-in-new-york-city)

January 31, 2020 | by [Bitta Mostofi \(/component/contact/contact/1842-bitta-mostofi?Itemid=327\)](#)

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(photo: Ed Reed/Mayoral Photography Office)

Our nation has long been a beacon of hope for those fleeing their home country due to violence and persecution based on their race, nationality, religion, political beliefs, or membership in a social group. With resettlement as a refugee's last option for safety, we have welcomed them and supported their successful integration in the United States for nearly 40 years with the establishment of the Refugee Resettlement Program.

Under the Trump administration, however, this country's proud tradition of welcoming refugees and recognizing the contributions and impact of hardworking immigrants is under threat.

On September 26, 2019, President Trump signed Executive Order 13888—an unprecedented move to allow states and localities to block refugees from being resettled in their communities. His administration also capped total refugee admissions to a historic low of 18,000 at a time when the number of refugees and displaced people worldwide is at the highest point since World War II.

And as we've just honored Holocaust Remembrance Day this week, we must not forget the dark times out of which these policies and programs were created. Our nation turned a blind eye as millions of Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, including the hundreds of thousands that applied to immigrate to our country but were turned away due to the strict immigration laws and quotas that were in place at that time.

It was out of this humanitarian crisis that our country vowed not only to never forget, but never go back. Congress passed the first piece of refugee legislation in 1948, which would eventually become the Refugee Resettlement Program as we know it today. A profound moment of moral leadership and recognition that to sit idly by while the “victims of war and oppression” look to us for refuge is to hold “their fate in...our hands.”

Despite the best efforts of the Trump administration to dismantle the refugee program and take us back to those dark times, states and localities – many who share the deeply personal, profound, and real stories of refugees in their communities – have responded with an outpouring of support.

From Phoenix, Arizona, to Burleigh County, North Dakota, to Worthington, Minnesota, jurisdictions from across the nation have affirmed their commitment to resettle refugees in their communities and have recognized that true leadership considers the moral responsibility we hold to care for our fellow human beings who seek refuge from persecution.

New York City not only proudly issued consent to resettle refugees, but the city went a step further and joined a multi-city amicus brief in support of the litigation challenging the president’s order. Mayor de Blasio also joined with leaders across the nation [urging the Trump administration to rescind the executive order \(http://usmayors.org/wp-content/uploads/Mayors%20Letter%20in%20Support%20of%20Refugees%20112519.pdf\)](http://usmayors.org/wp-content/uploads/Mayors%20Letter%20in%20Support%20of%20Refugees%20112519.pdf), and return this year’s refugee admissions cap to previous levels. And on January 15 a federal judge blocked the executive order from going into effect for the time being.

The message is loud and clear: refugees are not only welcome, but they are invaluable assets to every community they make home. With refugee workforce participation at 81.8 percent, far more than the 63 percent national average, and with refugees quickly surpassing United States median household income and owning more businesses than any other group—immigrant or otherwise—refugees contribute meaningfully to our economy as earners, taxpayers, and job creators. They enrich our neighborhoods and communities through their cultural contributions, civic participation, and engagement.

It is shameful that the Trump administration continues to turn its back on refugee and immigrant communities. Just this week, the Supreme Court made the deeply troubling decision to allow the Trump administration’s xenophobic Public Charge Rule to go into effect –targeting working immigrant families. While the merits of the case are still being fought in court, millions of families, children, and the elderly are at risk.

May our history guide us in the recognition that from a place of darkness and depravity our country grew small and stained and from there we had no choice but to embrace the light and commit to a better and more just way.

At a time when there are so many efforts to divide us, communities in New York and across the country continue to say, we will never go back to closing doors on those in need, and we will not allow the Trump administration to scare us into silence.

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