

From the desk of:
Rep. Greg Swift

Remarks by Senator Mark Hatfield on refugee resettlement

U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[...] Mr. Chairman, as you probably know better than anyone else in the Senate, there is no political advantage whatsoever that can be gained from advocating a continuation of traditionally generous refugee and or immigration politics. You have been on that firing line.

We hear so often that compassion fatigue has set in across this land and that we need to slam shut the door of entrance to the United States. Irresponsible reporting and irresponsible politicians have blurred the distinctions between persons seeking asylum and persons fleeing distressed economic conditions and persons seeking to come to the United States to be reunited with their families.

When the most important fundamental distinctions between these groups are lost in the haze of demagoguery, the compelling reasons for why the United States accepts an identified number of human beings as refugees is lost as well.

In 1983, the United States will accept for resettlement approximately 60,000 refugees. This compares with the 1983 admission levels of 420,000 for legal immigrants and at least 600,000 for illegal immigrants.

In other words, Mr. Chairman, of the approximately 1.1 million individuals entering the United States in 1983, only about 5 percent of those entering will enter as refugees.

And who makes up that 60,000? These 60,000 are persons from all over the world who are fleeing certain suffering and quite often, certain death; whether from the Far East, the Middle East, Asia or Africa, these human beings who are seeking asylum have one unifying trait. They're afraid for their lives, and many instances they have good reason to be afraid for their lives.

[...] I do not pretend to have the magic number that will represent the perfect balance. However, without hesitation, I will state that the United States' role in providing hope for those fleeing tyranny, in providing assistance to the countries of first asylum who bear the immediate brunt of refugee migration, and in providing shelter for our appropriate share for the refugee population, must not decline.

This does not mean that the United States should admit everyone fleeing war or the threat of war. It means simply that refugee policy must not be the whipping boy for our country's inability to control illegal immigration. And it means that if we abandon our responsibility to uphold freedom by providing hope to those who are not free, then we have failed history and we have failed ourselves.