

The original documents are located in Box 21, “12/17/75 - Remarks at Meeting of Advisory Committee on Refugees” of the President’s Speeches and Statements: Reading Copies at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN....

December 17, 1975

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

I am honored to welcome you back to the White House, to thank you personally for the tremendous work you have performed as members of my Advisory Committee on Refugees.

When we gathered in the East Room seven months ago at the time this committee was established, you were faced with a very serious challenge. Approximately 130,000 Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees were coming to our shores in search of safety and freedom and a new life.

I entrusted in your capable hands the difficult assignment of helping these new citizens enter and adjust to American society. You were faced immediately with sizable logistical problems, with refugees from a culture very different from our own, and with a certain degree of apprehension from among our own fellow Americans.

But thanks in large part to your efforts and your good influence, these initial obstacles were overcome and our newest citizens have all found homes in a country prepared to welcome their contribution to our society.

Less than 1,000 refugees remain at Fort Chafee, Arkansas. They have all been sponsored and are simply awaiting the completion of travel arrangements to take them to new homes and new lives.

The other 132,000 have already been settled in cities and towns all across America. Again thanks to you, they have jobs. They have the professional certificates they need. They have good homes. They have a bright and promising future in this great land that is now theirs as well.

I am well aware of your efforts. Each of you visited at least one refugee station during the early days of our effort. Your recommendations helped make the camp conditions as comfortable as possible. Your regular meetings and your conscientious work paid off.

The fact that you are going out of business now, five months ahead of schedule, is a remarkable testament to your skills and your dedication. The fact that you are going out of business at all marks you for special distinction in the history of Presidential committees.

I think the way in which this assignment was carried out also deserves attention -- since there were a number of other ways this problem could have been handled. One way would have been to create another Federal agency, especially for refugees, putting them on our welfare rolls, making them wards of the government, adding still another permanent layer to the federal bureaucracy.

Instead, we chose to ask the "fifth branch" of government -- the public -- to help us. Outstanding representatives of business, labor, the professions, and the churches helped spearhead this most successful effort in providing our new citizens a new life of their own. Now, instead of new burdens on our society, these new friends of ours are doctors, farmers, mechanics, teachers -- contributors to our society and masters of their own destinies.

I think this is still another reason we can celebrate Christmas in 1975 with a little more joy, a little more hope, and a little more love for our fellow countrymen.

I thank you for the great part each of you played in this effort:

John Eisenhower, your hard-working, dedicated chairman; Roger Semerad, who provided valuable support and staff assistance; Ted Marrs who coordinated all of the Vietnam and Cambodian refugee resettlement activities -- each and all of you have my deep appreciation and that of 214 million of your fellow Americans.

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