

National Leaders Call for Immediate Restart of Refugee Resettlement Program



Transcript | Press Briefing 4/21: National Leaders Call for Immediate Restart of Refugee Resettlement Program

Speakers:

- **Kate Brick**, Executive Director, Refugee Advocacy Lab
- Pittsburgh Mayor **Ed Gainey**
- New Mexico Attorney General **Raul Torrez**
- **Mark Hetfield**, President, HIAS
- **Aisha Koroma**, Refugee Congress Delegate representing Washington DC
- **Shawn VanDiver**, Founder and President of #AfghanEvac and U.S. veteran
- **Brandon Mendoza**, President/CEO, Erie, PA Chamber of Commerce AND
- **Rev. Noel Andersen**, Church World Service and the United Church of Christ

Kate Brick: Hi. Good morning, everyone. We're letting folks trickle in. We'll get started in just a moment. Okay, let's go ahead and get started. Welcome. Thank you all for joining us.

My name is Kate Brick, and I am the Executive Director of the Refugee Advocacy Lab, a partnership between Refugees International, Refugee Congress, and the International Refugee Assistance Project. We came together today with Church World Service, HIAS, and Refugee Council USA to showcase the strong call from leaders throughout the country for the restart of the long-standing refugee resettlement program. Today's briefing is going to be on the record and will be recorded. We will send the recording and transcript to you following the call, and then you can be in touch with our team on media availability for any of the speakers. My colleague Etant can take those inquiries, and his email will be in the chat.

As you all know, in its first days of Office, the Trump administration indefinitely suspended the U.S. refugee resettlement program, creating serious harm for the thousands of refugees previously approved for resettlement who were stranded abroad, and for U.S. communities. With the halt in the resettlement program, on January 20, the Administration called for an initial report on the future of the program in 90 days and every 90 days thereafter. The first report was due yesterday. We have yet to hear whether this report was delivered to the White House.

At the same time, a consequential case on the future of the program, *Pacito v. Trump*, is making its way through the courts, with rulings today mandating that the administration restart the resettlement of thousands of conditionally approved refugees, among other actions.

Today, we are here to emphasize that the actions of the administration do not represent the best interests of our country. To speak to Secretary Rubio's priorities, they do not make us safer, stronger or more prosperous, and they're out of step with what Americans want. We know from our own polling that the majority of likely voters believe the United States should have a refugee resettlement program.

In the last several months, groups across the country have made this case. More than 300 state and local elected officials from both sides of the aisle, including Pittsburgh Mayor Gainey and New Mexico Attorney General Raul Torrez, both of whom are with us today, hundreds of faith based organizations, and thousands of people nationwide have publicly called for the immediate restart of the program.

We are joined today by leaders from these communities to help paint a clear, tangible picture of what these policy changes have meant on the ground and why it's critical that the administration reverse course. So I'm really pleased to welcome our speakers today. We have Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey, New Mexico Attorney General Raul Torres, Mark Hetfield, President and CEO of HIAS, Aisha Koroma, Refugee Congress Delegate representing Washington DC, Sean Vandiver, founder and president of #AfghanEvac, Brandon Mendoza, President and CEO of the Erie, Pennsylvania Chamber of Commerce, and Reverend Noel Anderson, representing Church World Service and United Church of Christ. We will hear from speakers, some brief remarks from each of them, and then we're going to open it up to questions from the press.

So to get us started, I'm going to turn it over to the mayor of Pittsburgh Ed Gainey. The city of Pittsburgh has long been a leader nationally for prioritizing policies that ensure that its refugee and immigrant community are welcomed, including becoming an officially Welcoming Certified. Mayor Gainey, thank you so much for joining us. I'm going to turn it over to you.

Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey: Good morning. First, I just want to say thank you for having me. I think this is a very, very important issue. I think it's an issue that we have to continue to discuss, not just on this dialogue today, but every single day. You know, coming into the city, I wanted to make sure that this city was the safest, most welcoming city in America. And we cannot grow, we will remain status quo in terms of population, if we don't receive our immigrants. And I want everybody here to know that for us in this city, we are open, and we want you to come here. Let me make that statement very clear: whether other people in White House are doing what they need to do, here, we want you to come here. And here's why it is so important for us. We want to make this a vibrant city. We want to see our population grow. This is a land made up of immigrants. This is a land where immigrants help to build our economy. We've always been strong, and there is no reason why we should go back. The refugee resettlement program right

now needs to be restarted right now. Not later, right now. We can't continue to go around harming and hurting people. We have to make sure that we do what we've done in the past... continue to build an America based on immigration and based on our refugees, so that this city, this county, the United States, will continue to grow. And in our Commonwealth alone, 54,000 refugees are from Pennsylvania. Do you know what that does to our economy? It helps our economy to grow. Over \$2 billion in spending power. Over some \$760 million in taxes. This is how you grow a state. This is how you grow a city. And so I'm glad to be here today and be able to stand up, because if we don't stand up, then we'll continue to allow them to do what they want to do. And it's only the voice of the people that's ever overcome the power of those that want to be able to oppress people that they know that they should. It's up for us to stand up, and so I'm glad to be joined here with everybody. And like I said, it just can't be about the day. It has to be about every single day that we speak out against this level of injustice. We have to get the resettlement programs restarted. If not, it's a detriment to the security of America.

Kate Brick: Thank you so much, Mayor Gainey, really powerful words. We're going to turn it next to New Mexico's Attorney General Raúl Torrez. Attorney General Torrez is a career state and federal prosecutor and formerly served in the Obama administration at the Department of Justice. He is a leading voice in calling for welcoming policies and protecting the rights of newcomers in our communities. Attorney General, I'm going to turn it over to you.

New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez: Well, thank you for including me today, and I want to start by just saying how much I agree with the Mayor's comments about the strength of America being drawn from the diverse communities in the immigrant communities and refugees that we have welcomed into this country. I, you know, I will say that participating in this news conference today as a Catholic in the wake of the death of Pope Francis, I think it is an important moment to reflect on his legacy and on the fact that what binds so many faith traditions from across the globe together is this understanding that our first moral obligation is to help those who are the most vulnerable, the weakest. And there is no community in the world, fundamentally, that is safe and will always be safe from political violence, from war, from famine, from disease.

We have been blessed in this country with great power and great resources. And I think the mark of our greatness is how we utilize that power, not to aggrandize ourselves, not to empower ourselves, not to promote only economic interests, but to export our ideas. And the most fundamental idea that can be shared with the world about the American spirit is our generosity. And I know that in a time of intense political division in this country, sometimes that gets obscured by the never-ending fights in Washington and the policy disagreements that we obviously have with the Trump administration. But at its core, I continue to believe that the American people are very generous people, which is why we have such strong support for helping refugees from across the world. And one of the things that we should always be mindful of is how we would wish to be treated if we were a stranger at the door. That is something that is foundational to my faith tradition and to so many faith traditions from around the world. And we are made better and stronger by integrating that into who we are, by showing how great and

strong we are by helping those who need it the most, and that's why I'm willing to support and defend this program, to continue to advocate for the rights of refugees and the dispossessed. I think it's what makes America truly great, and it should be a centerpiece of our foreign policy, our national policy, and our moral calling in the next century.

Kate Brick: Thank you very much, Attorney General. So I'm going to turn it over next to Mark Hetfield, President and CEO of HIAS, which is one of the nation's leading resettlement agencies, and is also a plaintiff in the *Pacito v. Trump* case, which is the first lawsuit challenging President Trump's executive order that suspended the U.S. refugee resettlement program. So Mark, over to you. Thank you.

Mark Hetfield: Thank you, and good morning. My name is Mark Hetfield. I'm President of HIAS, which is the Jewish community's international refugee agency. We're 122 years old, which makes us the world's oldest agency dedicated to refugees. Our partnership welcoming refugees with the U.S. government and Jewish communities across the country, including in Pittsburgh, long predates 1980 when the U.S. refugee admissions program was signed into law with strong bipartisan support.

That partnership abruptly ended on January 20 when President Trump indefinitely suspended the refugee program and subsequently completely defunded its infrastructure. In so doing, Trump stranded 128,000 refugees who had already been interviewed by Homeland Security and received written notices from the U.S. government that they were eligible for resettlement. Imagine the pain that these 128,000 approved refugees feel after being forced out of their homelands and spending years in danger and in limbo, after being separated from close family members, and after following the rules and pursuing a months or years long refugee resettlement process. The Trump administration has pulled the rug out from under these approved refugees and slammed the door in their face. To add insult to injury, President Trump's January 20 executive order says not one word about the many contributions that resettled refugees have made as new Americans. Refugees including Congressman Vindman, who was resettled by HIAS and Aisha Koroma, who works with HIAS now to welcome and help refugees integrate into this country. Nor did the executive order acknowledge the suffering that each refugee has endured, as by definition a refugee has a well founded fear of persecution on the basis of who they are or what they believe. Often, as is the case with our Afghan allies, this persecution was due to the fact that these refugees risked their own lives to protect American soldiers and American interests, only to now be abandoned by the United States.

Refugees have been a blessing, not a burden to the U.S. As you might recall, in his first refugee ban issued in January of 2017 President Trump commissioned a study to demonstrate just how much resettled refugees cost the American taxpayer. He never released that study, probably because it found that over a 10 year period, refugees actually contributed 63 billion – with a B – more in taxes than they cost federal, state, and local governments in services and assistance. The Biden administration then repeated that study and found that over a 15-year period, resettled

refugees made a net fiscal contribution of \$124 billion to the United States, their adopted homeland. At HIAS we welcome refugees as a Jewish agency, because we know, as the attorney general alluded to, from the Torah and from our history as a refugee people, that turning our backs on refugees is turning our backs on ourselves and on Jewish and American values.

This is why we joined with another faith based national resettlement agency, Church World Service, and with local resettlement agency, Lutheran Community Services Northwest as well as with impacted individuals to take Donald Trump to court to challenge his unlawful executive order. The first time the district court ruled on that case was on February 25 and ordered the administration to restart the refugee program. The part of that order that related to admitting 128,000 conditionally approved refugees was upheld by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Yet two months later, the administration has continued to defy the court order, noting in its filings last week that it intends to admit only a fraction of a fraction of conditionally approved refugees, and in fact, has taken no visible steps yet to even do that. We now wait for the administration's report on the potential resumption of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Their report was due to the White House yesterday, April 20. More importantly, we await the White House to implement the court order to resume the admission of refugees to the United States without further delay. Thank you.

Kate Brick: Thank you. Thanks so much, Mark. And I'm going to turn it over now to Aisha Koroma who you just spoke about, a former refugee from Sierra Leone. Aisha serves as the Assistant Director of Social integration at HIAS, and she is also a Refugee Congress delegate for Washington, DC. Aisha, over to you.

Aisha Koroma: Thank you. Good morning, everyone. I'm honored to be here today, not only as an American, but as someone whose life was fundamentally shaped by the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. As you mentioned, I was born in Sierra Leone, a country that was once torn apart by a brutal civil war. My family and I were forced to flee to a host country and leave everything we knew – not out of choice, but out of survival. We lived in limbo, unsure of what tomorrow would bring, until we were resettled by USRAP 24 years ago. For my family, the program wasn't just a policy, it was a turning point. It gave us a future. And today, I stand before you not only as a social service leader, but also as a licensed psychotherapist serving diverse communities, including our veterans, immigrants, and trauma survivors. I'm also proud to have been, you know, one of the founders of the first refugee mental health clinic in Houston, as well as the first refugee mental health and wellness conference, which later influenced other local resettlement agencies to consider culturally and linguistically appropriate trauma response in service delivery. Without a program like USRAP, a refugee kid like me may not have had the opportunity to do this and more. I've also advocated for more inclusive and supportive schools, served unhoused youth and championed mental well-being programs across the US.

USRAP opens doors that would have otherwise remained closed, and I've dedicated my life to making sure that those doors stay open for others as well. But I'm just one story. There's so many

Aisha's out there, including those still in transit, children and families waiting for safety, for stability, and for a chance to rebuild. USRAP is more than a program. It represents lives, dreams, resilience, hope. It is a gateway for future changemakers, doctors, engineers, artists, trades people. People who are ready and eager to become assets to America's workforce and to contribute meaningfully to its economy and communities. Pausing this program doesn't just delay paperwork. It delays possibilities. It ensures tragedies. It tears families apart, and it leaves people vulnerable. But most importantly, it sends a painful message that America is closing its doors, not only to those who need it most, but also those who fill jobs, those who open stores, and people who sat on our school boards. It is a loss for all. For my family, and my refugee community, and so many others, USRAP meant safety, dignity, and the opportunity to truly live and not just survive. It gave us a future when the world had closed in. And I really, really hope that we never, ever lose sight of that. Thank you.

Kate Brick: Thank you so much, Aisha, and you mentioned some of the folks that you serve in your work are veterans, and that's a great segway for me to turn it over to Sean Vandiver. Sean is a U.S. Navy veteran and founder and president of #AfghanEvac, an organization fighting to ensure the U.S. upholds its commitment to protecting and resettling Afghan allies who supported our mission. Sean, over to you

Sean VanDiver: Sure. Thank you so much, Kate. And thank you to all the leaders and organizations here today who are still fighting, even when it feels like we're fighting our own government, to just simply do the right thing. My name is Sean Vandiver. I served in the Navy. I'm the President of AfghanEvac. And since August of 2021, like so many people in AfghanEvac and around the country, I've been working every single day to help America keep its word to the Afghan allies who risked their lives alongside us.

When Kabul fell, there was no plan. There were no clear policies, no emergency system standing by, no cavalry coming. I was sitting right here at this desk, and I thought, surely the cavalry must be coming. That wasn't a thing. What we did have though were people, veterans, diplomats, frontline civilians, national security leaders, faith communities, everyday Americans who refused to look away. We came together with government, and we built something extraordinary, Enduring Welcome. We stood up new pathways, repaired broken ones from the first Trump administration, and worked hand in hand with our government to make CARE, the coordinator for Afghan relocation efforts, into an extraordinary machine. It became the most ambitious relocation and resettlement initiative our country has ever seen. Together, we've worked to get nearly 200,000 Afghans to safety. These are men, women and children who would not be here without the effort of the everyday American. Interpreters, aid workers, engineers, journalists, teachers, people who trusted us and who believed that America doesn't abandon its friends.

At its peak, enduring welcome was bringing to safety 5,000 Afghans on 28 flights a month out of Kabul, onto third countries, and then on to America after security and immigration processing. But now, it's zero. This administration is walking away from the program, which, for the very first time

in our history, is delivering on promises made to our wartime allies. Now I want to be clear, the Trump administration gutted the refugee program during the last time, and now it's gutting it again. That's a fact. But what's happening now, it's more insidious, because this administration claims to stand for veterans, while quietly deconstructing every mechanism we built to keep our promises. In fact, the State Department just submitted a proposal to OMB to wind down CARE, the very infrastructure that enables our most secure, legal immigration pathway in history, Enduring Welcome. So I don't want to hear from the Vice President, the President, the Secretary of Homeland Security, or anybody else – whether it's in a Signal chat or elsewhere – that they care about security. They're deconstructing our most secure immigration pathway we've ever had. Refugees with conditional approvals have been left waiting with no communication despite court orders saying that they should be able to come here. Parole is being terminated for Afghans who entered through CBP One, entered the southern border through CBP One, and they're sending erroneous messages to folks who came through Operation Enduring Welcome, or Allies Welcome, even though they're not supposed to be impacted. The SIV program, a hard earned promise to those who serve shoulder to shoulder with U.S. forces is barely limping along. Processing times are increasing. Transparency is decreasing. And the backlog is continuing to grow. We're seeing SIV processing grind to a halt, all while the administration pretends like it's still functioning. It's not. And now we're seeing something even more absurd. In the joint compliance report submitted Friday, the administration proposes to indefinitely suspend refugee resettlement, except for 65 hand-picked high-value Afghans. Let me say that again, 65. That's not a program. That's a photo-op. It's a betrayal of the thousands still in danger and of the thousands of Americans who work tirelessly to get them here. Do you know who's included in those, in those thousands that are left behind? 3,000 individual family members of active duty U.S. military. Don't tell me you stand with the troops.

You heard earlier that there's the 90 day report due on executive order 14163, it was due yesterday. We'll give them an allowance for Easter, and say it's due today. Where is it? What does it say? We don't know, it's not necessarily going to be a public report. I'm guessing that it reflects bureaucratic cowardice and a disturbing willingness to let this program die a quiet death. If the proposal I mentioned is any indicator. Well let me, let me just say, we're not going to let that happen. We are being noisy about this, because we're not going to let this die quietly. Let me tell you what it really means. It means Afghan women and girls are being left behind. It means families are being torn apart. There are 10,000 family members that need to be reunited. It means veterans are watching our government betray the very people we fought alongside. It means the Trump administration is leaving behind about 250,000 people who stood with us and believed that our flag means something.

We built Enduring Welcome in service of the simple truth, if you stood with America, America will stand with you, not just a tagline. It's a moral obligation. Another point is that this isn't about right or left, it's about right and wrong. We made a promise, and this administration is actively choosing to break that promise for both refugees and SIVs. And this isn't about process. It's about political will. Enduring Welcome, and with it, the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, didn't break. It's being

broken – on purpose – by people who'd rather look tough on immigration than do the hard work of leading. So let me say this to the administration as plainly as I can. You don't get to say you support vulnerable people and refugees while pulling the plug on their lifeline. You don't get to thank veterans while ignoring our pleas to finish this mission, and you definitely don't get to campaign on moral leadership while abandoning the very people who believed in America. We don't need more reports. We don't need more meetings. What we need is action. We need flights, we need visas. We need a government that keeps its promises, a government that people can trust. To the press, please do not let this story fade. To members of Congress, step in, use your oversight power, call this what it is. And to the administration, there's still time to fix this. There's still time to keep your word. But not much. Time is running out, and the moment for action is now. Across the country, communities are ready to welcome refugees. You heard it from the mayor, you heard it from the Attorney General, you heard it from Mark, you heard it from others. Veterans are ready to stand by our allies. Churches, cities, employers, schools, we're all ready. It's time for the federal government to catch up. Thank you.

Kate Brick: Thank you so much, Sean, and one of the many groups that you spoke to just now that we've been talking about a lot recently, is the business community and the role of employers. And so with that, I'm going to pass it over to Brandon Mendoza, who is President and CEO of the Erie, Pennsylvania Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership. Brandon has been a very strong voice in the business community arguing for immigration policies that recognize the critical role that refugees and other newcomers play in strengthening our economy. Brandon, with that, I'll turn it over to you.

Brandon Mendoza: Thanks, Kate. And you know, as others have said, this is critical. In Erie, our critical resettlement agencies are in imminent danger from the ongoing freeze at the federal level. These organizations in Erie have already laid off several dozen of their employees with additional cuts expected every day that this program does not get reenacted. Currently, the agencies employ about 110 staff members in our county, and what we're doing, this crisis is forced our local leaders and partners, so we're partnering at the local level with an organization called Infinite Erie, and also with the Erie Community Foundation, to raise funding to help support these organizations for short-term support, because this has been a lifeline to Erie County, and has helped reinvigorate our county.

Some tidbits about the refugees in Erie County. One, they own 5% of our businesses in Erie County, despite only being 4.1% of our population, 47% of those resettled into our county are homeowners. They've contributed over a quarter of a billion dollars to Erie's economy annually. Refugees in Erie County have helped preserve over 500 manufacturing jobs that would have otherwise vanished or moved elsewhere. So what we need, obviously in the short term, we're working to shore up these agencies and support them, but long term, we need the federal government to restart this program and to start to fund those organizations that are on the ground doing the work. What we've seen and what we know is that every day that they do not, our regions and our local cities and municipalities and school districts, they're going to be the

ones that are going to pick up the tab at the local level, because many of our of our resettled folks, obviously still need ongoing services to make sure that they're integrating into our neighborhoods and so forth. And these resettlement agencies in our region have done, you know, amazing work in our some of the most proficient with resources and everything else.

So without that, without restarting the program, I mean, you're talking about severe layoffs across the country and obviously in Erie, but you're also talking about passing the cost to the already resettled folks here and integrating them and their kids. You're passing that on to the school districts. You're passing that on to the municipalities. You're passing that on to a whole bunch of agencies that are not equipped to do this work. When we currently have organizations that could that are doing this work and are able to do it, and they're not being funded. So on behalf of the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership, I'm calling on our federal partners and elected officials in this Administration to restart this program.

Kate Brick: Thank you, Brandon. So for our last speaker, I'm gonna turn it over to Reverend Noel Anderson to close us out. Noel is the National Field Director at Church Road Service and a faith leader with the United Church of Christ. And Noel, I imagine you're going to speak to this as well, the Attorney General referred earlier to the passing of Pope Francis and how important this issue was to him, and I imagine that's very much in your thoughts at this moment. So I'll pass it over to you and then we'll open it up for questions from the press.

Rev. Noel Andersen: Yes, most definitely. Thank you so much, Kate, and it's an honor to be part of such a distinguished panel as we recognize the auspicious day in which Easter and the deadline for the report regarding the refugee suspension was due. As we celebrated Easter, my family partook in our congregation in a symbolic ritual I remember as a child.

Yesterday, I helped my two young children go to the front of the church and place a flower on the cross. As each person in the congregation comes forward, the cross, a symbol of empire and death, is transformed into something representing hope, new life, community, and beauty.

Refugees across this world are facing oppression and fatal consequences because of their ethnicity, religious practice, social group, just as early Christians faced, just as those from the Jewish and Muslim, and other traditions have faced throughout history. The refugee program has signified a space of refuge and hope for the world as a beacon of light for democracy. Now, because of the increased discriminatory attacks on all immigrants, including refugees, we're in a dire place for this program, even as it is clearly represented in our laws written by Congress, and with a recent court order to resume the refugee program. Yet it has not happened, and now our own democracy is in danger. Still, we come today with hope. Hope that a movement of people of conscience and people of faith will continue to grow to ensure that this democracy continues to bloom, and that the refugee resettlement program will continue to thrive.

In light of our 79-year history of Church World Service that began during refugee resettlement, we launched an Ecumenical Declaration defending refuge on Ash Wednesday. We now have

over 500 faith organizations and congregations and nearly 300 faith leaders and lay leaders signed on, passionate about advocating alongside refugees. And as you mentioned, Kate, today we also honor Pope Francis's legacy. We remember his stalwart advocacy on behalf of immigrants and refugees, and we are called to continue that prophetic legacy. Now throughout our sacred texts, we are called again and again to welcome the sojourner, to love our neighbors. These are the central values throughout all of our faiths. And in one of our Easter electionary texts, Ezekiel 36:26, it reads, "a new heart, I will give you, and a new spirit, I will put within you, and I will remove your body, the heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh." Let us be a society that is centered on the values of compassion and love for all our neighbors, and let us continue to be part of the struggle it takes to truly build welcoming communities with a strong refugee resettlement program. May it be so.

Kate Brick: Thank you, Reverend Anderson. Thank you all so much for joining us and for your powerful, really thoughtful comments, making this, what is a policy very tangible and on how it's affecting so many people here in the United States and abroad. So at this point, I'd like to open it up to questions from the press. You can feel free to raise your hand, your virtual hand, or put questions in the chat function. Please state your name and your outlet along with your question.

I saw we already have a question from Jesus Garcia from El Diario, New York and L'Opinion who asked what is the status in the courts of the challenge against the Trump administration's plan to dismantle the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and when will we have a new decision. Mark, if I could give this one to you as a plaintiff in that case?

Mark Hetfield: Sure, it should be very soon. Just at the end of last week, we filed, as did the defendants, the Department of Justice, a joint report, proposing a timeline for implementation of the order restarting the refugee program. The only thing that the government agreed with us on is that there are, is the definition of a conditionally approved refugee and that there are 128,000 of those. Other than that, we didn't agree on a single point. The government showed no willingness to implement the program beyond a very small handful of so-called, high priority Afghans. And so we are waiting to have the court rule. The court should rule any day, I believe this week. So it should be soon, hopefully, and hopefully we can finally restart the refugee program for these poor people who had who thought they were approved months ago. Many of them already had plane tickets in-hand. HIAS had over 600 refugees ourselves, and were waiting to arrive, who were approved to arrive who had those plane tickets taken away from them.

Kate Brick: Thank you, Mark. We had another question that was submitted in advance from Jeff at the Philadelphia Inquirer, somewhat similar to the last one, but he said, hoping you can address the state of future resettlement agencies that are going broke. So less about the court and more about the impacts of the executive order. How can you continue to resettle refugees if everyone doing the work is being laid off? So Mark, I'm going to go back to you for this as a representation of a resettlement agency and then Noel, Reverend Anderson, I don't know if you want to speak to that as well, also representing a resettlement agency.

Mark Hetfield: Yeah, it's, it's a really important question. The main difference between what happened in 2017 and what's happening right now, is that in 2017, Trump did not completely dismember the refugee resettlement infrastructure. This time he did, and he defunded the entire infrastructure, effective almost immediately. You know, HIAS alone has laid off hundreds of staff, as have the other agencies. In fact, ironic that the Pope passed yesterday because the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, probably, for many years was the largest resettlement agency. They have already announced that they have had to drop out of the resettlement program, so we are now down to 9 agencies, which raises this very real capacity issue. And if this situation continues much longer, the capacity will continue to erode. So it's really important that the court order is respected and implemented and the program is resourced appropriately. So at the very least, we can bring in those refugees who are already told they've been approved by the U.S. government.

Kate Brick: Noel, did you wanna add to that at all?

Rev. Noel Andersen: Sure, yeah, just trying to get off mute here, yeah. So I mean for Church World Service, obviously it's been devastating like it has for all refugee resettlement organizations. We've had to lay off hundreds of staff and furlough many staff, but of course, it's not about us as an agency, right? These people are dedicated to this work. They come to this work at so many of them, perhaps refugees themselves in the past, not out of trying to make some kind of profit, right? I mean, obviously we're a nonprofit organization, but because they care about this work, because they're passionate about this work, because they're helping other families and community members that they relate to, and now. That capacity that's there that Mark mentioned of the staff who are, who know how to do this work so well, who are, are assisting so many people, you know, is, is being thrown out in a way that is not only unjust but inconsistent with our laws and inconsistent now with these court orders and, you know, moving. This administration seems to strategically attack immigrants and refugees as a way to destabilize democracy, and we're not going to let it happen. We're going to continue to struggle together as refugee agencies, as faith organizations to ensure that not only are immigrants and refugees respected and welcomed, and that this program can continue, but that our democracy continues to live on as well.

Sean VanDiver: Kate, can I add something?

Kate Brick: Please, Sean, go ahead.

Shawn VanDiver: So a couple points here, Noel and Mark made some good points about what is happening with the infrastructure. I think it's important to point out that a lot of folks when they get here, they take jobs in that infrastructure, and they just lost a bunch of jobs. So you had folks that did make it here, that are now out on the streets, looking for new jobs with all that, that, you know, corporate knowledge that they had about resettlement, the lived experience that they had,

and that's all gone. The other point I wanted to make was that Afghans are sort of in a special bucket here because there were these, these places around the world, Qatar, Albania, the Philippines, etc. where we were taking Afghans, they were going to processing, they were coming on. Well, there are 1,200 refugees stuck in what amounts to a prison camp in Qatar right now. It used to be a very pleasant environment, and the staff there is extraordinary. But, now people are trapped there. With no idea where they're gonna go. And the State Department doesn't seem to want to solve it. And that seems like a scandal to me that we have children in a prison camp in Qatar. Who knows what's gonna happen with those folks, right? Are they gonna have to become Qataris? I don't think Qatar would like that very much. These are families of active duty U.S. military. They're, they're children who are separated from their families due to our actions flying them here. These are men, women, children, the elderly. Lots of folks who were approved by USCIS, ready to go. After undergoing the most stringent vetting our country's ever had, more stringent vetting than the military, more stringent vetting than police officers, more stringent vetting than clergy, more stringent vetting certainly than any politician I've ever met. And the thanks that our country is giving to these folks for their patience and their kindness and their service to us, is we've trapped them in Qatar. Or trapped them in Pakistan. CARE's throwing people out of housing. They're evicting people. It's just unconscionable what our government is doing right now, and we don't have to do it.

Kate Brick: Thank you, Sean. I'd like to bring it back now, a bit more to what some of the impacts are locally, and so press, please feel free to continue to add questions or to raise your hand, but I don't see anyone raising their hand right now, so I wanna just take a moment to ask: Attorney General Torres and Mayor Gainey, with this opportunity, you know, both of you signed this letter we talked about earlier, for more than 300 state and local elected officials calling on the program to be restarted. Taking this moment in front of press, what message would you like to send to our national elected officials about the importance of this program and how would you like to see people be involved in advocating to restart resettlement? Attorney General, should we start with you?

New Mexico Attorney General Raúl Torrez: Sure, I, you know, I, I would start by framing this in, in the terms that the Secretary of State framed the question when they justified terminating the program and whether or not that makes this country, any policy decision is it makes this country safer and more secure, and more prosperous. And, and my perspective is, is that, not only does, does this program put at the forefront of our foreign policy and our domestic policy, the moral obligations that we have as a nation that is, that is committed to lifting up everyone, not only in the United States, but the world, it is a recognition that by providing economic prosperity and hope and opportunity for, resettled people who are, you know, in a situation that they have no control over. They are in many respects, the victims of historical circumstances beyond any of our control, whether it's war or famine, and the like, but to offer an open hand to those communities, to welcome them into this country, to give them a chance, as Aisha has, and so many others before her have to contribute to this country, to lift up America, to, also demonstrate to the world, that this is a nation that deploys and uses its power for the, for the benefit of all. It's a recognition

that we are made safer and stronger not by closing ourselves off from the world, but by opening ourselves up, and inviting those in who have, I think a unique perspective on what it means to come from societies that have collapsed for any number of reasons, and to bring that hope for a new way forward and for a new world into this country, it reinvigorates the American spirit to add these voices and their perspectives. It reinvigorates us economically, but spiritually and morally, to listen and learn from those who understand what it means to have lost a voice in democratic societies or to have never had that voice. It lifts us all up, when we can hear from them about the struggles that other people in the world are facing, and it puts into perspective all the things that we have in the United States that frankly, we lose sight of. We get up, we get so caught up in the United States in our partisan conflict, that we fail to recognize that there are people all over this world who are really living on a nice edge, and their perspective, I think, will shine a light on all that we have to be grateful for in this country and the commitment that we have to have to bringing this country back together again. I think to Sean's point, this is a group of people and, you know, I'm, I'm a, I'm a state prosecutor, I was a federal prosecutor. I can tell you that within the context of the immigration debate, one of the things I routinely hear is that people support lawful immigration. That's exactly what this program is. I hear routinely about people who are concerned about public safety and crime, and to Sean's point, the folks who have been resettled as a part of this program go through enormous vetting and screening. And, so they, their presence in our country makes us better, makes us safer, makes us stronger economically, but most importantly, it renews a sense of America's moral purpose in the world, and I think that's what we desperately need right now.

Kate Brick: Thank you so much. Mayor Gainey, go ahead, please, over to you.

Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey: Yes, it's unfortunate because I think this is a very destabilizing position. I think it makes America less, less safe. I really do. I think that it really focuses on division and hate instead of bringing people together. I think the separation of it does nothing to talk about what made America and unified us as a democracy. And so I'm very concerned about it from that level and that perspective because it continues to create us versus them instead of a united America for everybody, what democracy was built on. I'm extremely concerned about the safety issue of what message this, in particular the people that's always, you know, used the theme of immigration of being. And a problem because they don't understand this immigration that built America. I'm very concerned about that right there.

I'm also concerned from a welcoming standpoint as an American, America is supposed to always be welcoming to all immigrants, all refugees. We're supposed to be a welcoming city, I mean a welcoming country, and this right here is going against who we are. And I'm always concerned about when we're going against who we are, because then you have an internal conflict that's not easy to address when you're going against who we are in terms of how we were established and grown as America.

Being welcoming is what welcomes people to us, that builds the trust and unity that we need to continue to move forward. Without that, removing that, rolling that back is problematic because that's why I said in the beginning, we need to make sure we jumpstart these resettlement programs. If we don't, is sending a message to the world of hypocrisy of how we can be open to the people? How can we do this to people? And at the end of the day, we're shutting people out, we're shutting programs off, programs that unite us, programs that bring us together, programs that do all the things that's necessary. So I'm very concerned about that. And then from, just from a point of the economy, you heard everybody talk about the economy. If we know that immigration is good for the economy, why are we trying to cut off our own economy? Like it makes no sense. And it absolutely makes no sense that we are trying to cut off our own economy.

And so for me, it comes to those three things. One, we understand in order to continue to be particularly in a global economy, we need to have many nations here in America. We always had to help us grow from that perspective. Two, is this anti-democratic movement about, you know, we want to keep people out, we don't want to keep people out, create pathways and make sure that people come into the United States of America built on immigration. And three, I'm worried about racism. It talks about segregation and that unification, and that always scares me.

Kate Brick: Thank you so much, Mayor. I, those are really powerful remarks, I think to close on, unless there is a final question from press, I'm just scanning and I don't see any.
I'm

I want to thank all of you, all of our speakers, Mark, Reverend Anderson, Attorney General Torres, Sean, Aisha, Brandon, and Mayor Gainey for taking time this morning to talk about this critical issue in this critical moment. I want to thank the many, many folks from the press who joined and just remind you that all of our speakers are available for further media inquiries or interviews. Feel free to contact my colleague Etant and we'll put his email again in the chat. Wishing you all a good day and thank you again.