



Refugees like my ancestors are part of what made America great

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October 23, 2020

(CNN)-I am the great-granddaughter of refugees who fled Russian pogroms in 1895. Had they not been given safe haven here in the United States, they would have been tortured and killed. My very existence depends on international humanitarianism, an awareness that has inspired me to work closely with others like them.

Over the past four years, I've witnessed, in horror, the deterioration of our country's tradition of welcoming the world's most vulnerable people to our shores. On September 30, President Donald Trump and his administration announced the US has set a refugee cap of 15,000 for the next fiscal year, the lowest in the country's history. With the UN estimating that at the end of 2019 there were 79.5 million forcibly displaced people, the refugee crisis is at its height, while the US humanitarian response is at a shocking low.

As our country's leadership turns its back on people in desperate need of help, people like me have had to take action. Five years ago, I founded a program that provides daily meals to nine Sudanese and Eritrean refugee daycares in South Tel Aviv in Israel. I made an award-winning short-film about this program, which I called "Food Refuge."

Most recently, I've worked with an Afghani refugee family in the Bronx, supporting their two young boys' transition into the American school system. This past summer, between my junior and senior years of high school, I conducted extensive research on refugees' contributions to the US economy under the mentorship of a Columbia University professor. I hope that my research helps convince even the most skeptical Americans that admitting refugees into our country is not only a humanitarian obligation, but also an economic cause.

The day of the Trump Administration's alarming announcement at a campaign rally in Minnesota, the President warned attendees about "Joe Biden's plan to inundate your state with a historic flood of refugees ... coming from the most dangerous places in the world."

Despite Trump's incendiary words, the fact is that there has not been a single act of domestic terrorism committed by a refugee since the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, according to an analysis by The Cato Institute. But his continued use of xenophobic, anti-refugee rhetoric to energize his political base should not come as a surprise. Since 2017, the Trump Administration has repeatedly proven to be the most anti-refugee in the history of this country, lowering refugee quotas every year.

Meanwhile, Trump's most important policy objective — and indeed his loudest rallying cry on the campaign trail — has been about strengthening the economy. I know that convincing the President that he should actually want people fleeing war or persecution to find safe haven in our

country, a long-standing American value, is perhaps a lost cause. But, I would hope that his position would change if he knew that study after study has proven that refugees actually benefit the economy.

For example, a 2017 study by New American Economy found that in 18 states, refugees have a collective spending power of more than \$1 billion, with an additional \$17.2 billion in California. In addition, a 2016 Fiscal Policy Institute Study found that refugees tend to experience great wage growth and upward mobility, making them less likely to drain money from government services.

None of this information is secret. Yet, in 2017, Trump told the United Nations, "For the cost of resettling one refugee in the United States, we can assist more than ten in their home region." He likely based this claim on a report from the Center for Immigration Studies, which narrowly measured only the costs of Middle Eastern refugees.

A study draft rejected by the administration provided a more comprehensive picture. Produced by his own Department of Health and Human Services between 2005 and 2014, it included data on payroll, income, property, and sales taxes, and found that refugees contributed \$63 billion more to government revenues than they cost.

At the same Minnesota rally where Trump disparaged refugees, he bragged about his administration's ability to create and keep jobs in America. The US Census Bureau estimates that by 2060, for every two and a half working adults, there will be one retirement-aged person. (By contrast, now there are approximately three and a half working adults for every retiree.) Fewer people in the workforce will put greater stress on Social Security and healthcare. Creating and keeping jobs in our country will mean little if there aren't enough working-age people to fill them. And thus, as the New American Economy Study explains, admitting more refugees — who are likely to be of working age — would supplement our aging population and keep our economy robust.

The same study showed that refugees are also likelier than native-born Americans to start businesses, which could perhaps sway the President, a proud businessman himself. Thirteen percent of refugees are entrepreneurs (and 11.5 percent of immigrants generally) -- again, both higher than the native population. In fact, in several key sectors of our economy -- transportation, general services, tourism and hospitality, and retail trade -- there are more refugee entrepreneurs than American-born ones.

Following years of refugee work, I've seen firsthand that people willing to upend their lives and embark upon treacherous journeys in hope of a better and safer future are rarely lazy or dependent on others. They work hard, persist, and create.

Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden better understands this and, to his credit, plans to raise the refugee quota to 125,000 and increase it over time. This would restore the United States' global leadership in refugee admission. One hundred and twenty-five thousand people is not a lot. In my opinion, it is not nearly enough -- the refugee quota was over 230,000 in 1980 in the US. But that amount will no doubt be a major boost to our economy. And if our country's noble traditions and a sense of moral obligation haven't succeeded in persuading President Trump to admit more refugees, perhaps economic self-interest can. Refugees have already helped make America great, and can help make America even greater now.

