Youngstown rally backs immigrants, refugees

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More than 100 people gathered in Youngstown to protest recent immigration policy. Singer Maureen Collins led the group in a round of "This Land Is Your Land."

Stefanie Wagner-Ryan of Cortland came to a rally in downtown Youngstown clad in a pink Women's March hat while carrying a sign that read, "I will trade one president for 10,000 refugees."

Wagner-Ryan was one of about 100 people who turned out Friday afternoon at Central Square downtown for a demonstration billed as the Rally for Freedom and Justice.

Civic and religious leaders spoke against President Donald Trump's executive order banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries for 90 days. The order also included a 120-day suspension of the refugee program.

A federal judge, however, temporarily blocked the order after a legal challenge filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, and another federal judge, in Seattle, granted another nationwide delay Friday night.

Representatives from the Arab-American Cultural & Educational Center of Youngstown, the Youngstown Area Jewish Federation, the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Youngstown and the Catholic Diocese of Youngstown spoke in support of immigrants and refugees.

"Treating one group of people unfairly and unjustly is a threat to us all," said the Rev. Kenneth Simon of the Youngstown Community Mobilization Coalition. "We don't need a wall, but we need to build bridges of peace and opportunity for all."

Dave Betras, chairman of the Mahoning County Democratic Party, railed against both Trump and U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, a Republican from the Cincinnati area.

"I'm proud to say we're one of the 487 [counties] that did not vote for Donald Trump," Betras said. "This is not Donald Trump territory. And thanks to all of you and your hard work, we didn't let this become Donald Trump territory."

Democrat Hillary Clinton beat Trump in Mahoning County, though only by just 3 percentage points.

Also attending was state Rep. Michele Lepore-Hagan of Youngstown, D-58th, who referred to Trump's order as a "Muslim ban."

During his campaign, then-candidate Trump called for a temporary "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States," though he later adjusted his position, saying he would prohibit entry from countries posing a significant terrorist threat.

The libertarian Cato Institute found that between 1975 and 2015, no fatal terrorists attacks in the United States have been attributed to nationals from the seven countries named in Trump's executive order – Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan and Yemen.

Mayor John A. McNally, a Democrat, and representatives from the offices of U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Cleveland, and U.S. Rep Tim Ryan of Howland, D-13th, condemned Trump's order as an intolerant measure that would make Americans less safe.

Poland resident Randa Shabayek sees Trump's claims about national security as a smokescreen for bigotry.

"First he will go after the Mexicans and the Muslims," she said after the rally. "Then, we'll have to see what group he goes after next."