

## What refugees and other newcomers really mean to America: Correcting Trump's hateful lies

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The three authors of this article have among us over 50 years of experience working with immigrants and refugees. For two years, President Trump has been escalating his demonization and lies concerning these newcomers to America and those who look for refuge here. Moreover, he advances inhumane and questionable (at best) policies to keep them out.

One of the authors heads an organization that earlier this month joined an amicus brief in support of a lawsuit challenging the latest such policy — the Trump administration's recent proclamation banning asylum seekers from being eligible to claim asylum in the United States, unless they cross the U.S. border at an official port of entry.

Trump claims they "would be detrimental to the interests of the United States." But our own experiences tell a dramatically different story.

The presumption that immigrants are especially crime-prone is simply mendacious. Data from all U.S. Censuses going back to 1980 show incarceration rates for new immigrants to be well below that for native-born Americans. According to the non-partisan EconoFact research network, "The rate of incarceration of immigrants is consistently lower than that of native-born of similar ages."

Are they likely to be terrorists? The libertarian Cato Institute determined that the chance of an American being killed by a refugee terrorist is 1 in 3.64 billion. Vetting of refugees before being admitted to the U.S. can take up to two years. Top Republican security advisers say a robust refugee resettlement program bolsters our national security interest by supporting countries on the front lines of fighting terror.

Are immigrants taking jobs from Americans and draining local resources? Trump's own Department of Health and Human Services found that refugees contribute \$63 billion more to the U.S. economy over 10 years than they take in public assistance and services. Giovanni Peri, an economist who studies immigration labor at the University of California, Davis, said that with the kind of cutoff in immigration Trump envisions, "There would be companies closing and relocating. There would be jobs lost. There will be towns and cities that would see half their population disappear." A PBS News Hour report highlights how Utica, New York's commitment to resettling refugees is "a pioneering economic tool for revitalizing the Rust Belt" — one example of many demonstrating the benefits refugees bring with them.

The three of us have seen up close the real stories of refugees and immigrants who come to the United States.

Becca Heller heads the New York-based International Refugee Assistance Project, which joined the above-mentioned brief, and which sent lawyers to airports around the country to protect people who were detained and threatened with deportation when Trump signed his first Muslim ban. These are people like Hameed Darweesh, an Iraqi who worked for 10 years with American troops as a translator, risking his life and being threatened and ambushed in retaliation for his service. On Darweesh's arrival at JFK on a valid visa, he was separated from his wife and children, handcuffed, detained and told he would be returned to Iraq, where his life was in danger. A team of legal experts fought his deportation, and he was released in less than 24 hours. Trump administration policies treated him like a threat when in fact he protected Americans.

David Lubell's Welcoming America supports some 200 cities and towns across the country where immigrant and refugee ingenuity has helped turbo-charge local economies. Nashville, for example, made an about-face, from being called "the epicenter of the anti-immigration movement" in 2005 to positioning itself as a global welcoming city and attracting investment and talent that helped it experience the fastest job growth of any city in the country by 2012. Jose Luis Ayala, an immigrant from Mexico, just one Nashville story out of many, was fearful for himself, his family, and his small business. Now his Las Palmas company has grown into one of the largest Mexican restaurant and food distribution chains in the south.

Sasha Chanoff is executive director of RefugePoint, which helped evacuate and resettle widows and orphans who were victims of massacres in the Congo in 2000. Among them was Daniel Kanyaruhuru, a 14-year-old boy who had become mute after he was tortured and watched the murder of family members. After arriving in the U.S. Daniel went to college, became a national track star, pursued a master's degree, and became a coach and motivational speaker. He is only one of many tens of thousands of refugees contributing to America's vitality as law-abiding, tax-paying citizens.

Jose, Hameed, Daniel and the many like them renew America. They help make it great, as immigrants always have. Their contributions need to be acknowledged and held up as examples, not demonized for political advantage.

Trump's and others' vicious, deceitful, myth-mongering efforts to heighten anxiety about immigrants and refugees must be denounced, exposed and countered. Protecting and caring for those unjustly persecuted and mistreated makes us stronger as a nation and makes us and the world safer.