

## **Gov. Bill Lee's decision to welcome refugees into Tennessee consistent with conservative values**

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As a political refugee from Cuba, it is easy for me to agree with Gov. Bill Lee's decision to continue the resettlement of refugees into Tennessee. Thanks to the compassion of previous government policies, my family and I were able to escape communism.

But my personal story is not the only reason why I believe we should continue welcoming refugees into the state. I am also convinced that welcoming refugees is consistent with conservative values I hold dear, including defending the rule of law, American exceptionalism, and support for religious freedom.

Having escaped from a country where private property rights are routinely violated, I know first-hand how important the rule of law is to protect personal rights and liberties.

It makes sense for me to open the same door that was opened for me

I was pleased to learn that Gov. Lee worked closely with the Trump administration in ensuring that every refugee who is admitted under this program has followed our country's laws and will have the proper paperwork to live and work here legally. At a time when there is so much blatant disregard of our country's immigration laws, it is encouraging to see our immigration system working as it should.

Additionally, the Trump administration has beefed up the vetting process from previous administrations to ensure the refugees who are coming here do not pose a threat to our country and to our local communities.

Even prior to increased vetting of refugees, the CATO Institute found fewer than two dozen of the millions of refugees the U.S. has admitted over several decades have ever attempted an attack on U.S. soil.

Welcoming refugees is also consistent with our country's heritage and values

As far back as the Pilgrims who fled England from religious persecution, America has represented a beacon of freedom and refuge from oppression. More recently, our country welcomed European refugees following the devastation of two World Wars, including Albert Einstein – the most influential scientist of the 20th century.

Of course, not every refugee will be the next Albert Einstein. Most will lead unassuming lives. But my Christian faith teaches me that every person is created in God's image with inherent dignity and worth – regardless of race, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. I am hoping my fellow

Christians will see the continuation of the refugee resettlement program as an opportunity to minister and disciple those in most need.

I am proud to live in a country that cherishes religious tolerance and religious freedom. And at a time when people are being jailed, tortured and even killed all over the world because of their faith, it is more important than ever that we live up to our highest ideals. One of the best ways we can do this is by welcoming those who are being persecuted for their faith.

Unfortunately, some in our state are succumbing to fear, mistrust and misinformation saying that we should close the door on refugees. They say that our local communities cannot possibly absorb more people, but thanks to pro-growth economic policies being enacted at the state and federal level, Tennessee's unemployment rate is below 5% in nearly every county.

They say we must take care of Americans first before helping others, but couldn't we do both?

After all, we are talking about a refugee population that is relatively low – less than 700 people.

Welcoming refugees into our state is the right thing to do. It affirms American leadership and her highest values. By turning our back on our country's heritage and history, we turn our backs on part of what makes us great.