

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REFUGEES

THE EAST ROOM

12:07 P.M. EDT

Members of the Congress, members of the Advisory Committee, members of the Federal establishment, members who are here just to participate:

It is a great privilege and pleasure for me to welcome you to the White House on this occasion. I definitely am grateful for your coming to Washington on this occasion on such short notice, but time is of the essence.

If I might, I would like to now sign the Executive Order and make a few comments at a later point.

We have a big job to do, and we have asked some outstanding people from all segments of our society to participate. I am delighted, of course, to have John Eisenhower act as Chairman. His experience in Government, his leadership, will be invaluable as we try to meet this critical problem as quickly and as successfully as possible.

We got a great deal of support from many segments of our society. I was extremely pleased when we received a telegram from George Meany of the AFL-CIO. I am sorry George could not be here, but he is well represented.

We received a number of other communications from individuals and groups -- business, agriculture, professions, labor, of course, many church organizations, Government, State as well as municipal -- and the response has really been most heartwarming and very encouraging to those of us who felt that our country had an opportunity to again reassert the open door policy that we have had for so long on behalf of people who wanted to come to this great land.

It seems to me that as we look back over our Nation's history most, if not all of us, are the beneficiaries of the opportunities that come from a country that has an open door.

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In one way or another, all of us are immigrants, and the strength of America over the years has been our diversity; diversity of all kinds of variations -- religion, ethnic and otherwise.

I recall very vividly a statement that seems apropos at this time, that the beauty of Joseph's coat is its many colors. The strength of America is its diversity.

The people that we are welcoming today, the individuals who are on Guam or in Camp Pendleton or Eglin Air Force Base, are individuals who can contribute significantly to our society in the future. They are people of talent, they are industrious, they are individuals who want freedom, and I believe they will make a contribution now and in the future to a better America.

We do have some difficulties in trying to assimilate as quickly as possible some 100,000 plus, but the Congress has responded, organizations are participating, administrative people are working literally night and day, and the net result is we are making headway and progress.

I don't mean to discount the problems, but all of you, and those that you represent, can help tremendously in the days ahead.

I can assure you that we will give maximum attention, we will make every conceivable effort, to see to it that your job is made easier so that our new friends can start a new life in this great country. We are a big country.

Some 35,000 heads of family are joining us. Sixty-five percent of those who are coming are children. They deserve a better chance. They deserve the warmth and the friendship which is typical of America.

I just thank all of you for what you have done and what you will do in making this job easier and better for people that we want as good Americans.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 12:13 P.M. EDT)