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## Welcoming refugees is what a proud nation does

By Ambassador Ryan Crocker

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"Thank God and the United States to be here and safe."

So said Nabeel Hasan last year at a Thanksgiving dinner sponsored by Interfaith Action of Central Texas. Hasan escaped grave danger in Iraq and found safety in this great state. He's far from alone. Between October 2015 and August 2016, Texas welcomed more refugees than any other state.

I myself am no stranger to that famous Texan hospitality, having relocated here to become dean of the George Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M. Aggieland felt like home from the moment I arrived in 2010. If I was thankful to start a new life in Texas, you can imagine the gratefulness of people who escaped the brutality of ISIS or the bombs of dictatorial governments.

Now, however, Texas may turn its back on refugees. The governor has announced that the state will pull out of the federal refugee resettlement program. This is a major mistake. It represents a break with Texas' proud history, and with the ideals of a country long committed to protecting victims of war and persecution. The move sends precisely the wrong message to other states and to the world.

A sad result of this heated and confusing campaign season is that Syrian refugees have become mingled in people's minds with their oppressors. Syrians, along with Iraqis, are the primary victims of ISIS. As a former ambassador to Syria, I know the country well. Committed to hard work and education, Syrians are precisely the kind of people I'd want living in my community and attending my child's schools.

Also among the people who need our country's protection - and who suffer when resettlement efforts are rolled back - are Afghans and Iraqis living in danger because they worked with the U.S. military or U.S. government. When I worked in the government, I teamed up with leaders in Congress to establish a special visa program to allow these brave allies to reach safety in the United States. This is simply a matter of keeping our word.

Politics and emotion, not facts, are driving the hostility toward refugees. "The federal government lacks the capability or the will to distinguish the dangerous from the harmless," Gov. Greg Abbott said, "and Texas will not be an accomplice to such dereliction of duty to the American people."

That sounds scary, and it would be if it were accurate.

Our government has successfully screened refugees for years. In fact, they are vetted more thoroughly than any other traveler seeking to come to the United States. In June, I was among a bipartisan group of former government officials - which included former secretaries of Defense and State, former CIA directors and former National Security advisers - who confirmed the soundness of the security process. We pointed out that it "includes screenings by national and international intelligence agencies, fingerprint and other biometric data checks against terrorist and criminal databases, and multiple rounds of interviews."

Welcoming refugees doesn't threaten U.S. national security. On the contrary, it refutes the propaganda of ISIS, which seeks to convince Syrians and Iraqis that they belong in the caliphate, not the west. At the same time, America's resettlement effort helps relieve the countries bordering Syria. Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon are struggling to host millions of refugees, and it's in the interest of the United States to support their stability.

Before coming to Texas A&M, I worked overseas for more than three decades, serving as an ambassador in six countries in the Middle East and Central Asia. Everything I learned as a diplomat and public official led me to believe that America's compassion for refugees is a source of strength.

Providing them protection is what a proud and confident nation does.

*Crocker was U.S. ambassador to six different countries and is a board member of Mercy Corps.*