

**COULD FRESNO AREA HMONG BE DEPORTED TO LAOS?**

Nearly five years ago, then-Presidential candidate Donald Trump descended on an escalator in Trump Tower and began his daily hate-laced vitriol against immigrants and anyone who doesn't look like White Americans. Since the beginning of his presidency, we've been bombarded almost daily with his vicious tweets against immigrants—especially Mexicans, Central Americans and Muslims.

This administration's heinous immigration policies, and violation of international law regarding asylum-seekers, is causing chaos. Now, there is concern in the Central Valley's Hmong community of a threat some Hmong here could be deported to Laos.

According to a report in the *Fresno Bee*, this stems from an executive order issued more than three years ago—days into the new administration—that makes it a national security priority to remove people from the United States who hold a final deportation order. This will likely separate families and send people to a country that they never known.

Because of these new policies, even those who might have committed a minor crime more than 20 years ago, and who have now served their sentences, would now face deportation to Laos. Local advocates say if people in this status are deported to Laos, they would face danger upon their return. The reason: Many such potential deportees locally are descendants, or direct relatives, of Hmong guerillas who were recruited or forced by the CIA to fight the Communists in the "Secret War" operations of the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s.

Charles P. Pierce, writing in *Esquire* magazine last month, said, "No group of people were so cruelly betrayed by our fiasco in Southeast Asia as were the Hmong. They fought in our wars for us there, and then, when we left, we cut them completely loose and left them at the mercy of their—and our—enemies. Since they fought in Laos, where we weren't supposed to be fighting, we disavowed them."

So far, according to Wisconsin Public Radio, about 4,500 Hmong and Lao residents in the United States who are not citizens have been mostly safe from deportation because of a long history of human rights violations against the Hmong by the Communist government of Laos.

That might be about to change.

Twin Cities/Pioneer Press reported last month that the Trump administration is negotiating with the Lao People's Democratic Republic on an agreement that would send some Hmong and Lao non-U.S. citizens back to Laos—the country of their birth. Keep in mind that many of these people were born in refugee camps and were brought here as children.

The same source reported that a State Department news release issued recently stated that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with a Laotian foreign minister in January to discuss such a deal. In response, U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum (D-Minn.) sent Pompeo a letter of strong opposition to the plan.

In a recent Channel 30 Action News Report, Lucky Siphongsay, executive director of the Fresno Interdenominational Refugee Ministries (FIRM), made it clear that these concerns are real, stating that "they don't even speak the language. Some of them don't even have family ties, aunts or uncles in that country, so it can be very, very difficult for them to navigate."

It's estimated that Fresno has about 34,000 Hmong residents, making it the second-largest urban Hmong population in a U.S. city. (Minneapolis/St. Paul has the largest urban Hmong population.)

For Bobby Bliatout, the California Democratic Party's endorsed candidate to oppose incumbent Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Tulare) in Congressional District 22, this is personal. He is the son of two Hmong refugees from Laos. In a statement issued on Feb. 14, Bliatout stated that "it is unconscionable to deport individuals to a country in which they can be expected

to be persecuted, imprisoned or killed. Human rights conditions in Laos are not conducive to the safety of any Hmong resident.

"The same State Department working to deport these individuals has made the dangers clear in their annual Human Rights Report. I strongly oppose this action, and I hope the Trump administration will reconsider their course of action and remember the sacrifices and contributions the Hmong people have made for America."

These concerns among the Central Valley Hmong population are real and palpable. The Fresno County Democratic Party stands in solidarity with our Hmong and Laotian brothers and sisters.

**Call to Action**

Volunteer now with the Fresno County Democratic Party to ensure a Blue sweep in November in all elective races up and down the ballot starting with the presidency. Your help is needed now for canvassing, phone calling and get-out-the-vote efforts. To assist, call 559-495-0606, visit [www.fresnocountydemocrats.org](http://www.fresnocountydemocrats.org) or drop by the Democratic Party HQ at 1033 U Street in downtown Fresno.

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