

HB

576

Can Alaska say 'no' to everyone?

Rep. Mike Miller of Juneau is pushing a bill through the state Legislature which would study the possibility of bringing a community of Laotian Hmong (formerly we called them Meo) to Alaska. Miller, a good and decent man, is being helped in his effort by the Valley Rotary Club in Juneau. What they are doing is very important to us, both as Americans and as Alaskans.

Not so many years ago, this nation was seriously engaged in keeping the communists out of Indochina. Many of those we came to save were unable to fully understand what we were doing there, but the Hmong understood. They hated the communists.

Laos is not a country in any traditional sense. For centuries, assorted conquerors—the Chinese, the Khmer, the Vietnamese, the Thai—swept across what is now Laos, but they paid little heed to the fiercely independent hill tribes, who in any event repaid unwelcome attention with violence. The French were unwilling to abide such a lack of structure; they imposed the present boundaries of Laos upon the tribes for the sake of administrative convenience. After the French went away, the princes and mystics down in the sleepy river capital of Vientiane exercised little jurisdiction over the Hmong; in fact, until fairly recent times many Hmong had never heard of Vientiane.

Soon after the U.S. came striding into Southeast Asia, many of our "allies" began to absent themselves from combat situations. Anywhere in the field you could hear people below the rank of E-5 asking aloud: If they don't care enough about this to fight, then what are we doing here? (I have, of course, cleaned up the language). But the Hmong cared. Directed mostly by CIA spooks, they fought the Pathet Lao bravely and successfully, and sometimes they even harassed the North Vietnamese Army.

But for all their valor, the Hmong were not crazy. They knew that if we got out, the communists would take over Vientiane, the cities, and the river country, and then attend to the liquidation of the Hmong. So the Hmong asked the Americans to take care of them if things reached such a pass; and the evidence is that our people promised help, even though it was later asserted that these statements did not bind the U.S.

We didn't take care of them, of course: we left Laos, in much the same secretive manner in which we had arrived. Sure enough, the Pathet Lao and their Vietnamese friends did exactly what the Hmong had predicted. Many Hmong died; others were imprisoned or treated in ways calculated to break their spirit; the rest live in



Steve Cowper

refugee camps in Thailand, wretchedly attended.

I believe we gave our word to the Hmong, and that we ought to stand by them. Mike Miller's bill seeks to redeem a part of the national honor in a way that also honors Alaska.

It is an appropriate time for Alaskans to make a gesture through which we can take a measure of public pride. Maybe it has something to do with the savaging of our people by the national press; or maybe we have, in recent years, witnessed the damage caused by greed and wastefulness to simple civility. We are not a mean and selfish people; historically Alaskans have identified themselves with compassion and generosity.

According to legislative staffers, the Hmong have been passed over for resettlement because of their lack of a written language and their difficulty in adjusting to urban living after so many centuries of a simple agricultural existence. But a group in Minnesota has successfully adapted itself to rural and

small town life and, incidentally, to the cold.

Mike Miller's bill is important in yet another aspect: it causes people to think about the refugee problem in a general sense. The persecution of the Hmong was politically inspired, as was the case with the Cubans, the Vietnamese, the Afghans and, in another decade, the Hungarians. Americans empathize with people who are escaping oppressive governments, even though our response is often hesitant.

There is another class of refugees that we had better address in an intelligent manner: economic refugees. The poor countries, especially those hooked on petroleum-based fertilizer and energy, are sinking into a sea of debt paper in order to keep their rapidly-increasing populations from starving.

Some of the poor countries are riddled with both political turmoil and economic disaster: indeed, it is difficult at times to tell which is cause and which is effect. Even if political stability could be conferred by a magic wand, a great deal remains to be done quickly in the poor countries to resolve questions of energy use, wasteful allocation of resources, and population control.

The international bankers, who recognize the magnitude of the problem, are keeping the poor nations afloat right now through generous loan

practices. They know that if those economies are allowed to collapse, the present trickle of economic refugees will become a flood. In the event of mass starvation, it does not take a great stretch of the imagination to envision hordes of refugees on the shores of the prosperous nations. If that happens, the alternatives will be to take them in—all of them—or to allow them to die. There will be no escaping that stark decision.

For those who think this last is idle paranoia, Haitians are arriving every day along the Florida coast. They are not running from the ministrations of the dictator "Baby Doc" Duvalier or the hated Tonton Macout, although they could be excused for doing so; they are instead economic refugees who look into the future and see the Grim Reaper.

The great American civil rights leader Bayard Rustin once said that we who believe in democracy must take chances. Mike Miller thinks we should be willing to take a chance that the Hmong settlement in Alaska will be successful and mutually beneficial to us all.

In the midst of all the scrambling over the oil money, those impulses seem worth pondering. Serious and dangerous things are taking place in this world, and it befits Alaska to assume a part of the responsibility for resolving them.

January 24, 1980

We support House Bill No. 576 and House Concurrent Resolution No. 41.

There are 13.2 million refugees worldwide due to oppression by governments, Communism, wars, and disasters. It has been estimated that only one of every two persons survives the long and dangerous journey to resettlement camps. Benjamin Rosenthal (D-NY), returning from a tour which investigated nine refugee camps in S. E. Asia, described them as "hellholes" where living conditions were "the most atrocious and grotesque that a human being can be in". (The previous information is from the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service..

The United States has pledged to take a large number of refugees now in camps. Most will die unless they are accepted into a country. They cannot remain where they are and live.

We believe that Alaska can play an important part in the resettlement of refugees. With over 20 million acres of prime farm land and over 100 million acres of grazing land, Alaska can be a leader in alleviating human suffering by providing an opportunity for subsistence farming.

Several subsistence farms currently exist in such areas as Hoonah, Haines and Delta Junction. Also there is a Russian settlement on the Kenai Peninsula. The research has been done to provide a basis for successful farming techniques in Alaska. It is now just a matter of applying what has been learned.

We would like to see Alaska take the leadership in providing a sign to the rest of the United States and the world that our government is responsive to the desires of the people in providing opportunity and freedom. In these difficult times, America needs acts of human compassion to rebuild lost confidence caused by charges of imperialism.

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January 24, 1980

At its January, 22, 1980 meeting, the Organization to Assist Refugees (OARS) passed a motion supporting House Bill No. 576 and House Concurrent Resolution No. 41.

OARS recognizes the potential of the bills to make a significant impact in alleviating human suffering and regards this action as a sign to the rest of the world that the American Government is sensitive to needs of people around the world.

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along with them? point, though, the capital movers will be acquainted with reality. In the real world, people and issues as crucial as the oil we cannot be bought and sold like so much merchandise. In the real world, issues with impact such as the capital move must be made in a responsible manner, not by "horse

My Turn

By DAVID M. HEAUME

Late last summer, Alaskans learned that higher oil prices would create a huge continuing surplus in the State government budget (estimated at between \$300 million and \$600 million for the present fiscal year). Since that time the Press has documented a grand outpouring of ideas as to how the money could be spent to better our lives and to increase our standard of living. To my knowledge, there has not been even one public suggestion as to how we might use a small part of our new wealth to benefit others.

Our apparent eagerness to indulge ourselves has not gone unnoticed by the rest of the world. The distasteful biblical spectacle of the rich man refusing to give Lazarus even the crumbs from his table fits too well what has become a growing public perception of Alaskans. We are viewed as the blue-eyed Arabs of the North greedily toting up ways to spend our new found riches while the single greatest human tragedy since the holocaust plays itself out in Southeast Asia. Even our gestures appear selfish. We talk of selling or giving salmon to starving Cambodians, not because they are desperately in need, but because we fear a glut on the market and a sharp fall in prices.

Personally, I am convinced that the image of Alaskans as insensitive and greedy is warped. We do not lack concern, only an idea. We are not unwilling to share with others; just unable to see how an influx of unskilled labor into our already weak urban job markets can much help anyone. If a way could be found, I believe Alaskans would move to the forefront in the effort to assist the Indochinese refugees.

As it happens, a way may be at hand. A bill will soon be pre-filed in the Alaska Legislature to appropriate \$50,000 to study the feasibility of relocating up to five hundred (Laotian) Hmong refugee farmers in a self-sustaining agricultural community here in Alaska. Through the use of innovative technology and local building materials, it may be possible to better at least a few lives. In addition to examining alternative technologies and appropriate building techniques, the study would consider what combination of State, federal and private aid can best finance the project. One possibility (that could even be mandated for consideration) is that a minimum percentage of the project be financed by the new farmers themselves out of contributions raised in a national fund raising drive. Some key Hmong leaders presently live in Billings, Montana and, conceivably, could help to coordinate such an effort.

The Hmong are Laotian mountain people of Chinese extraction who fought against the Communist takeover in Laos. In so doing, they lost their arms, many of their people, and most of their possessions. Since their defeat, they have learned just how quickly American promises can slip into the unremembered past. Despite official assurances of American resettlement aid and assistance, tens of thousands of Hmong people are presently living in Thai refugee camps, and have been for several years.

Although the Hmong were among the first refugees to enter Thailand's camps, they may well be among the last to leave. The attention and assistance given earlier to the Vietnamese boat people, and now to the Cambodians has come putty at their expense. Resettlement of some Hmong in their own farming community here in Alaska could dramatically improve matters for those in the

Refugees and Alaska

to be resettled, even given the rigors of the rural Alaska lifestyle. More importantly, an Alaskan effort aimed at assisting the Hmong could refocus international attention on their needs. Life on a farm in Alaska is no picnic, but then neither is life in a refugee camp. Compared to the alternative of continued incarceration or death, a chance to begin again in Alaska comes off as a rare opportunity indeed.

Westerners are certifiably incompetent at determining how best to assist persons from other cultures. For this reason, we must not jump to conclusions as to the potential success or the potential cost of the project. One important feature of the proposed study is consultation with the Hmong themselves. Helping them in accord with their own standards and their own expectations may prove to be considerably more "do-able" than one might initially suppose.

Even so, it must be admitted that many potential problems do come to mind when one begins to think about this idea. Not the least of these is the problem of land availability. Unless the federal government fulfills its D2 and Statehood Act obligations, it is hard to see how room for the Laotians could be found in Alaska. On the other hand, Laotian resettlement could be the wedge that pries free the State's full land entitlement from the federal government.

Because there are potential problems, no one is yet asking Alaskans to support resettlement, only to keep an open mind on the subject. Refugee resettlement has been declared the issue of the year by Rotary International.

The bill to fund the proposed feasibility study was drafted in response to a resolution passed in October by the Glacier Valley Rotary Club of Juneau. As President of the Glacier Valley Rotary Club, I can say that our members and other willing to consider this effort are not yet convinced that refugee farms will work, only that their establishment should be given careful consideration. I would hate to think that we foreclosed a chance to help others, to increase our own self-respect and to enhance our own self image without so much as a careful look at the possibilities.

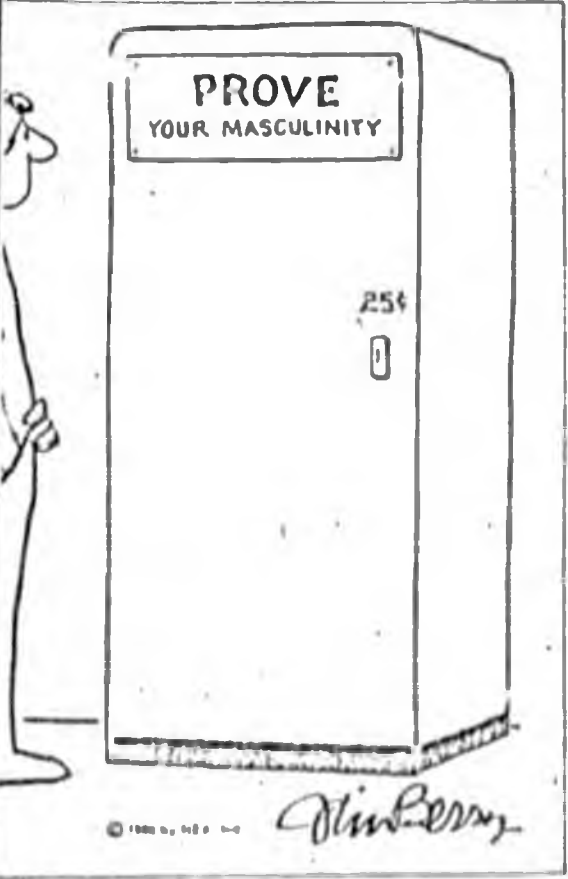
Precedent exists. Self sustaining agricultural farms have been part of the Alaskan landscape for many years. Physically, it can be done. The questions are: "At what cost?" and "In what manner?" We need to make a serious effort to find the answers.

Alaska's willingness to explore new and innovative solutions to the refugee problem could help lead to the problem's successful resolution, even if resettlement in Alaska is found to be totally unreasonable. One idea can give birth to another. The proposed study gives this process a chance to work. We ought to be willing to do at least that. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

"We cannot stand idly by, enjoying our own riches and freedom, if in any place, the Lazarus of the twentieth century stands at our doors. Riches and freedom create a special obligation. The poor of the United States and the world are your brothers and sisters. You must never be content to leave them just the crumbs from the table. You must take of their substance and not just of your abundance, in order to help them. And you must treat them like guests at your family table."

Note: David Heaume is the principle economist for the Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development and president of the Glacier Valley Rotary Club in Juneau.

My's World



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Outdoors



Craig Medred

Empire Staff Writer

A word of warning

No one can ever forget the sound.

It starts with a dull, rumbling roar that builds and builds until the valley walls echo, and when it stops there is a deadly silence.

Such is the sound of an avalanche.

It should rightly send shivers down the back of anyone who skis or snowshoes the backcountry in the winter or spring. No one challenges an avalanche and wins.

They are overpowering.

Count your days on your fingers ye who do not fear them.

There are ways to survive avalanches, yes. It has been done. There are people who have been hit and lived to tell about it, and because of that it is only wise to know what to do when caught up in a snowslide.

The best advice, though, is to stay far away from them.

Stay to the heavy timber or the ridge tops. Stay out of the barren valleys. It does not take a genius to spot an avalanche slope, especially in this country.

The valley will usually be bare as a baby's bottom, having been scoured clean by regular winter slides. Near the valley floor, they will, at best, be a maze of alders and small evergreens.

Avoid that. It is called a runout area, and if anything lets go above, it is the wrong place to be.

A better route is in the trees below it, protected from a sliding mass of snow.

There is much to learn about avalanches. This is not meant to be a primer on either how to avoid them or how survive them. That takes more information than can be printed here, and more common sense than any column can instill.

This column is meant, instead, as a warning.

People die in avalanches in Alaska every year. Many of them die needlessly.

It has been a long time since anyone died under a pile of snow in the Juneau area. Whether to call it luck or knowledge, I do not know.

What I do know is that Southeast Alaska is a prime place to be buried by an avalanche unless you're always watching for it.

Avalanche

Blasting snow to save lives

One is all it takes.

Avalanches drop with stunning swiftness. They catch people up in a raging torrent of flowing snow. Often, they kill.

More people died in avalanches in Alaska in the 1970s than in any other state, according to statistics. That is not a per capita figure.

In actual numbers, Alaska, the least populace state in the union, led the nation in avalanche deaths.

Skiers, snowshoers and others still go into the mountains unaware of the dangers, Norm Wilson, an avalanche expert said.

Wilson was in Juneau this week to conduct avalanche training sessions at the Eaglecrest Ski Area. A four-day field seminar, which ended Thursday, was designed to teach ski area personnel and others the fine points of avalanche control.

Blasting and other methods are used throughout the winter at Eaglecrest to keep the slopes safe from avalanches.

"You have to see it, feel it, hear it, work with it," Wilson said. "It (avalanche control) is not a science. It's an art, a well-defined art, but an art."

"The variables are endless."

The effectiveness of dynamiting avalanches is "very, very high," Wilson said, but "it's not 100 percent."

"Once in a while, because we're working with mother nature, we're going to be fooled," he said.

Still, he said, skiing in an area where avalanche slopes are regularly monitored is safer than driving in Los Angeles or any other large city.

The greatest avalanche danger exists in back-country areas, he said.

People going into the moun-

tains in the winter need to be aware of the danger and what to look for, or avoid.

"The public awareness along with the public need is growing," he added.

Seminars like the one at Eaglecrest help foster that public knowledge. In addition to Phase II seminars, such as those held at Eaglecrest, the National Avalanche Schools, under which Wilson runs the program, conducts a Phase I seminar "to give the student the best understanding of avalanche phenomenon...control fundamen-

tals...and) avalanche rescue." There is also a Phase III seminar for specialized avalanche-control training.

Wilson has worked in avalanche areas and taught avalanche-control throughout the West. He teaches a dozen seminars every year. Each attracts 10 to 15 students, he said.

The Eaglecrest school, sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service, drew 18 participants from Eaglecrest, the Forest Service, the city-borough and the state Department of Transportation.



Dynamiting snow



Norm Wilson

GOVERNOR, MRS. QUIE
HOST REFUGEE MEETING

Mrs. Albert H. Quie, a member of the ARC advisory committee in Minnesota, recently invited business, labor, religious and civic leaders to a lunch meeting in the Governor's Residence to hear a report from ARC's chairman and to ask their support of Indochinese refugees. Stormy Greener, photographer-writer of the Minneapolis Star and a member of the Minneapolis/St. Paul ARC steering committee, reported on her trip to "boat people" camps. Her photographs, which have received nationwide attention, will be the basis of an ARC slide presentation for sponsor development.

FUNDS
URGENTLY
NEEDED

ARC's efforts to help resolve a rapidly worsening crisis require contributions. The American Refugee Committee depends entirely upon private support and receives no Federal funds. Three offices now are in operation, and others are being planned. The approximate cost of recruiting, evaluating and following through on each sponsor is \$50. Thus \$50,000 is urgently needed for the current sponsor campaign as well as funds for medical programs and transportation projects being planned. ARC is incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation and contributions are tax deductible by IRS ruling.

While several foundation and corporation requests are pending, immediate needs urgently require contributions. Please do help now.

* * * *

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