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Let the Haitians In!

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 25, 2010 NCR Today

Some calls in politics are tough. Should the President pursue a stripped down version of health care reform or move on to something else? Should we continue the fight in Afghanistan with more troops or scale back our commitment in the face of frustratingly small results?

Some calls are not tough and one of those is whether or not America should loosen its immigration procedures to allow more Haitians to come here. Yes, we should. In the short term, fewer mouths to feed and fewer souls to provide shelter for will make it easier to take care of those who remain. Haitians who have relatives in America would have a home to welcome them and a family to help them so we are not transferring a refugee crisis from their shores to ours.

In the long term, Haitians will need to be repatriated, of course. The prognosis for rebuilding Haiti will not be improved by inviting some of its residents, especially those with skills and talents, to stay in America forever. Their skills and talents will be needed in Haiti. But, it will be a long time before teachers are more needed than construction workers on that island.

Congress or the Administration should create a special refugee visa that allows Haitians with relatives in America to stay here for six months, with the possibility of a further renewal in case the reconstruction efforts back home have not improved sufficiently to absorb the population. Big tasks are achieved with small steps. Liberalizing our immigration policy on a temporary basis, and in the face of an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, is more than a small step. It is certainly a humane step.

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