

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2307

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

March 22, 2007

Dear friend:

I would like to take a moment to update you on recent progress in Washington related to the "material support" clause that has affected so many Hmong and other communities.

The Real ID Act of 2005 contained language that was intended to help us fight the war on terror. Unfortunately, this language had a very negative affect on many refugees and others who have looked to the U.S. as a place of hope and a sanctuary from persecution. The law broadened the definition of who is a terrorist based on "material support," and made them ineligible for refugee status, or other immigration-related benefits. I was particularly dismayed by the effect of this law on Minnesota's Hmong community.

Let me be perfectly clear: the Hmong should never be treated as terrorists. America remains indebted to your service during the difficult days of the Vietnam War. Today you are valued members of our communities here in the United States. As your countrymen continue to face oppression from the Lao government, America has a moral duty to stand with you. Unfortunately, this law had precisely the opposite effect, and that is wrong.

Last year I joined with Senator Leahy (D-VT) in offering an amendment that would have resolved this problem. Unfortunately, our amendment failed to get much support at that time. There was an overall lack of information among my colleagues about the impact of this policy, and the Administration did not support our language either. This was quite a setback for those of us who had long believed that this law was unfair.

Today I have good news to report. During early January, the U.S. National Security Council, State Department, and Department of Homeland Security announced a number of policy changes they are making relative to this law. They are expanding to additional groups the waivers they have begun for those who have helped selected Burmese groups. They plan to create a waiver for individuals who have helped Hmong groups. They have also proposed legislation to give them the legal authority to no longer treat Hmong fighters and other similar groups as terrorists. This is long overdue.

While I am glad the U.S. government finally agrees with my own longstanding concerns about the way we have been treating the Hmong and others under the material support bar, I will continue to work towards a good resolution of this matter.

My staff and I have been in consultations with the Administration, human rights organizations and other Senators to see how we can ensure that this change in policy becomes reality. We will be working on legislation to make sure we treat the Hmong and others in a fair manner. We also want to make sure that cases which have stalled as a consequence of this law are resolved quickly and fairly under the new policies.

It may still take some time to iron out all the bugs in this issue, but I am glad that progress is finally being made. Please know that as your Senator I will continue to fight in Washington for policies that help Minnesota's Hmong community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Norm Coleman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Norm Coleman
United States Senate