A quiet struggle turns angry as gas threatens workers

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By DANIEL PEDERSEN

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Most Iowans are not inclined to violence, but a quiet struggle is building in Des Moines. (photo: AP)
Blue collar workers disapprove

IOWA POLL
Continued from Page One
welcoming" than the opinions expressed in the poll.

Since the Vietnam War ended in 1975, 3,843 Indochnese have found homes here — one refuge for every 749 Iowans. Of all the nations in the world, according to the governor's office, only Australia has taken in more refugees per person than has Iowa. Of all the states in the nation,

IOWA POLL

only eight others (most of them in milder climates) rank ahead of Iowa.

Whether it's despite that record or because of it, the poll shows Iowans who disapprove of the resettlement have a variety of reasons for doing so.

The most common response is that there are plenty of needy Iowans who deserve first consideration. After that come two conflicting answers: That the refugees take jobs away from others and that the refugees are too expensive to support.

Entry-level Jobs
Ray has heard those arguments before in angry letters to his office. But he dismisses all three with the contention that the refugees are industrious and willing to take entry-level jobs that others don't want.

"Here in Iowa," he notes, "we don't have a growing population. And as we attract new businesses and jobs, we can take new people. We have a very low unemployment rate." The governor said that the national leadership of the AFL-CIO and the Iowa leadership of the United Auto Workers have supported refugee resettlement.

But the poll suggests that support does not prevail among labor's rank and file.

THE IOWA POLL/

Boat People:

EDUCATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE...

Do you favor or oppose the resettlement of the "boat people" in Iowa?

ALL IOWANS

Education

Favor Oppose Opinion

less than high school 22% 78% 5

high school graduates 25 55 10

some college 60 32 8

... BUT IOWANS DON'T WANT MORE

Which of these statements comes closest to describing how you feel?

ALL IOWANS

1. The United States has a moral obligation to help them. It should increase the numbers it is willing to admit. 12%

2. The U.S. is doing enough now. It should continue admitting boat people at the current levels. 30

3. The U.S. is doing too much. It should admit some of them, but not as many as it is doing now. 23

4. The U.S. has enough problems of its own. It should admit no boat people. 30

Don't know 5

The state's blue collar workers solidly disapprove of bringing the Indochnese here (51 percent yes, 62 percent no). But while collar workers solidly approve (58 percent yes, 37 percent no).

Ray still asserted that Iowans "do have a heart" after learning of the poll's findings.

"Forty percent say we can handle it," he noted. "And I would say that many of those who are voting on the negative side, if it were explained to them and they fully understood, would reach out too. Their reaction is an expected one.... But you don't take care of your own problems by fleer taking care of others."

The poll shows most Iowans who approve of admitting the boat people feel that admissions should continue at current levels. It was not increased.

Most of those who disapprove say there should be no boat people settling here. However, a third of them say current admissions should be slowed down rather than stopped.

Questions
The poll was conducted Aug. 15-18. The following questions were asked:

1. Refugees from Indochnese, often called "boat people," are seeking new homes in various counties. Do you favor or oppose the resettlement of these refugees in the United States?

2. Why do you feel this way?

If resettled in your community, do you think these people would help or hurt the quality of life there?

Which of the following statements comes closest to describing how you feel about the boat people?

1. The United States has a moral obligation to help them. It should increase the numbers it is willing to admit.

2. The United States is doing enough now. It should continue admitting boat people at the current levels.

3. The United States is doing too much. It should admit some of them, but not as many as it is admitting now.

4. The United States has enough problems of its own. It should admit no boat people.

The IOWA POLL, directed by Glenn Roberts, is based on 1,000 face-to-face, in-home interviews with Iowans age 18 and older located in 100 community areas throughout the state. A professional staff of 40 independent interviewers follows a probability sampling method that eliminates interviewer bias.

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