



News from

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KOHL, FEINGOLD SEEK FUNDING FOR UPCOMING HMONG REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

*Office of Refugee Resettlement urged to provide funds to help communities
absorb 15,000 Hmong refugees expected in U.S. this summer*

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators Herb Kohl and Russ Feingold today requested immediate additional federal funding for Hmong refugee resettlement efforts to help communities in Wisconsin and across the country absorb thousands of refugees from Wat Tham Krabok in Thailand this summer. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has made \$500,000 available for Hmong resettlement as part of the FY2004 federal budget, but state refugee coordinators estimate that \$10 million will be needed to resettle this population when the first of an expected 15,000 refugees begin to arrive this month. Kohl and Feingold, along with Senators from Minnesota and California, wrote to HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson to request additional refugee resettlement funding this year.

“The Hmong refugees from Wat Tham Krabok have extraordinary needs,” the Senators wrote. “This population has been living as refugees in Thailand for years, many for over a decade. Conditions in Thailand have been extremely difficult - approximately half of the children have never received schooling; many have suffered from malnutrition. According to some refugee agencies, many of these Hmong suffer from mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, resulting from their isolation in the camps and uncertainty for their future.”

Many of these Hmong fought with the Central Intelligence Agency in Laos during the Vietnam War, providing critical assistance to U.S. forces. After the fall of Saigon, thousands of Hmong fled Laos and its communist Pathet Lao government.

In December 2003, the U.S. government unexpectedly announced plans to resettle up to 15,000 Hmong refugees from Laos currently living in Thailand, creating a need for federal assistance that could not have been anticipated when Congress earlier completed action on the FY2004 budget.

“Ensuring that the ORR has the resources needed to assist these refugees is important, not only for the Hmong, but also for the communities in which they will resettle. Without proper funding, local resources will be strained beyond capacity,” Feingold and Kohl said.

On their arrival in the United States, these refugees and the communities in which they resettle will face enormous challenges. This group will desperately need language training and job placement, as well as assistance in housing, food, mental health services, and medical care.

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