**Niskanen Center Refugee Resettlement Event: Panel II**

**Matthew La Corte:** Hi, everyone. Please take a seat. My name is Matthew La Corte, the government affairs manager for immigration policy at the Niskanen Center. Thank you once again for being here with us today. Our first panel this morning discussed why the U.S. has both a humanitarian and a strategic requirement to resettle refugees.

Our second panel is going to examine the question of how we resettle refugees and how we can best resettle refugees moving forward. First, I would introduce our panelists, their full bios are in the events program you have. I'll give you a short bio. First, we have Chris George, Executive Director of IRIS, or Integrated Refugee and Immigration Services, in New Haven Connecticut. Throughout its 35-year history, IRIS has helped refugees from all over the world from Southeast Asian refugees in the early 1980s, to Afghan and Iraqi refugees in recent years. Chris has been involved in community work since 1977 starting with the Peace Corps.

Jennifer Bond is the chair of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative, and the founder and Managing Director of University of Ottawa Refugee Hub. In 2015-2016, Professor Bond served on a full-time basis as Special Advisor to Canada's Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship on Canada's Syrian Refugee Initiative, a project which engaged over 2 million Canadians and brought over 40,000 refugees to Canada. We will explore more about that really amazing endeavor from our neighbors up North. Jennifer will also provide strategic advice to Canada's Ambassador to the U.N. and to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Finally, Chris Gersten, to my right, served as Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement from 1989-1993. From 2001-2005 he served as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Administration for Children in the Department of Health and Human Services.

Welcome, panelists. Thank you for being here. We will have about 30 minutes of discussion like the previous panel, then open up 15 minutes for audience Q&A. We invite you to tweet at the Niskanen Center and our participants use the hashtag “Niskanen Center events” and “refugees in America.”

A lot to discuss, so let's jump right in. Chris Gersten, let's start high level from your time at the Office of Refugee Resettlement from 1991-1993. Can you discuss how the United States interacts with the international community and the important role that we put in global refugee resettlement?

**Chris Gersten:** Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be with you. There's a sort of very rough impression out in the country that the United States decides on its own who we are going to take in and who we're not going to take in, and it's an American decision. The reality is that the United States was the leading country in the world since 1980, when we passed the Refugee Act, to try to create a systematic way to bring refugees into this country, to have structures set in place for each new wave of refugees.

The United States has played the lead role as one of a couple dozen nations that work together under the umbrella of the U.N. of UNHCR. And the United States moral leadership as the country that was taking the most, taking 100,000 and 120,000 refugees a year, then down to 80,000 and 60,000. That put pressure on our allies and our moral leadership, showing we are willing to take refugees from everywhere throughout the world under the umbrella of the U.N., provided moral leadership for our allies in Europe, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. I’m maybe leaving some out, but that’s the basic group. We would sit down under UNHCR leadership, around a table in Geneva or in New York and the UNHCR would say “Okay, there's half a million people who have been cleared to leave camps throughout the world, and this year we have to try to get out a quarter million of them.” The United States would say “Okay we have to take 80,000.” That's a big chunk. And that created the leadership for the rest of the world to take a substantial number of refugees.

Now we have slashed our refugee numbers. The announcement a couple days ago that we are going to go down to 30,000, it's really 30,000 who are going to be officially approved as the ceiling but the refugee resettlement community believes that number would be closer to 15,000. Just like the 45,000 that were officially allowed in for 2018, really turns out to be more like 25,000-30,000. 30,000 is the ceiling. We are really down to 15,000.

None of the countries in the rest of the world, with the exception of Canada, none of the countries are picking up the slack, which is a reflection about our moral leadership when we abandon that role, nobody is going to the front line. Sweden is not saying “We will go from 5,000 to 20,000.” France is not saying “We’ll go from 10,000 to 30,000.” Everybody else is staying flat. Canada, which wants to grow its population, has increased its entry numbers in response to America cutting. But no one else in the world has, it’s not very significant. So, our role in the world is a role of moral leadership since World War II. Military leadership, economic leadership, and moral leadership are extremely important on the world stage.

The leadership that we have in doing things like taking in refugees, and responding to humanitarian crises around the world, is a reflection on us, on our country, on our character, but it also compels other nations that share our values, the value of human life, to get on board and to do their share. So, I'll be taking other questions about the impact of us cutting back and what that means on the world stage.

**Matthew La Corte:** Jennifer has a front row seat to the Canadian experiment on refugee resettlement. Can you talk to us about your private refugee sponsorship program, how you took in so many Syrian refugees and also give us kind of an overview of the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and your efforts within that organization?

**Jennifer Bond:** Thank you, and it's a very great pleasure to be here. Thank you very much for the invitation. For many years Canada was unique in the way that it resettled refugees, and this particular uniqueness was the way that it broadly engaged a very large number of ordinary citizens.

In the late 1970s in response to the Indo-Chinese crisis, a lot of countries stepped forward. Canada in that moment decided to allow groups of five or more individual Canadians to directly welcome and integrate refugees. And they in fact, set up a matching program. The government put out a challenge to individual Canadians, and said “For everyone that you bring in through this new mechanism, the government will also bring in one more through the traditional government supported resettlement stream.” And that emergency push in the late 1970s has evolved into a very robust program, now 40 years old, which is about individual Canadians welcoming and integrating over 300,000 refugees on top of what our government has done through other programs. It's a significant part of how Canada has achieved its resettlement commitments.

A couple of specific notes about the program, and I’m happy to go into more detail, but a few advantages that we see are the facts that refugees coming in through sponsorship groups can go to more parts of Canada. So, our professionalized services are tending to be located where we have big urban centers, that also tends to be where it’s hard to get housing, and in some cases, where it’s hard to get entry-level jobs. So, there's a tension between having access to language, health services and cultural integration services, and having access to parts of Canada where there might be other reasons that resettlement would be more successful.

At the same time Canada is also facing pressures in some of our rural communities around our economies. We are looking to grow our rural communities. We don't have a lot of workers in some of those communities. We are seeking low skilled people to join and stay and invest in some of those locations. So, what sponsorship does is it has allowed people to go outside of places where there's highly specialized services and instead resettle in the remainder of Canada. That's best exemplified by the numbers coming out of the Syrian Program, where we brought in a lot of people fairly quickly. Only in a few months, we put all of our government supported refugees in 35 major cities. And we put our privately supported refugees in over 400 communities all across the country, including some very remote small towns where people have done incredibly well.

The other number that's significant coming out of this Syrian Program is the fact that over 2 million Canadians engaged in sponsorship, and over 7 million supported their neighbors who were former sponsors, so it's a snowball effect. The way to best understand it is if you and five or ten or 20 people in your community, in your workplace, in your book club, whatever brings you together as a small community. If you needed something like a car seat, crib, or help with language lessons, because you are responsible for providing all those things, you would pick up the phone and call your networks. “Hey, does anyone have a car seat I can borrow?” You post on Facebook, “Is anyone free on Thursday night to offer some language tutoring informally in someone's living room?” And because of the snowball effect, over one-third of Canada's population was involved in welcoming Syrian refugees during those two years between 2015-2017. So, it's a very big program, it touches a lot of people at a very local level. So that's a final thought I will say is it is a link between the local and the global in a way that doesn't happen with our traditional programs.

You've asked me to comment briefly on the global scene as well. It's a big question so I might come back to it, but I will just say that for 40 years, Canada was unique with the amount of responsibility and empowerment that it gave to its citizens and that has now changed. So, the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative is a partnership between the government of Canada, UNHCR, the Open Society Foundation, the Radcliffe Foundation, and the University of Ottawa. So, five very diverse partners. We are brought together around a common goal of trying to share the model sponsorship. And really roll up our sleeves and help stakeholders at both the community and the government level who are trying to introduce these programs. I'm happy to say that we are working with over 20 countries right now who are expressing interest in this form of resettlement, and seven countries are now piloting or implementing these programs.

So, Canada is no longer unique in the world. We actually see a lot of governments recognize the benefits of this form of resettlement. I’m happy to go into those benefits or any subsequent question. Thank you.

**Matthew La Corte:** Last year I had the wonderful opportunity to go up to New Haven Connecticut and attend a training session for cosponsors at IRIS, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services. Chris, can you tell us a little bit about your community group sponsorship program and how it differs from the traditional model of resettlement in the U.S.?

**Chris George**: It's an honor to be here today and thank you, Niskanen Center, for inviting me. And bravo to Canada for doing such an incredible job of resettling refugees and setting an example for the rest of the world.

But you don't have to go to Canada to see community co-sponsorship programs work for refugees. You just come to New Haven, Connecticut. We have been in operation, IRIS, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services, since 1982, a smallish size refugee resettlement agency. And for most of our existence we've been resettling refugees the common way that most refugee agencies resettled them, with our staff and with some volunteers, usually individual volunteers, sometimes volunteer groups, who do pieces of the work.

I don't know who we have in the room, but does everyone understand how the traditional or the typical refugee resettlement program works? You know there are nine national organizations, about 200 small medium-sized nonprofits, get an e-mail, “A family of six Syrian refugees is arriving in two weeks.” We run out, find an apartment, we furnish it with donated furniture, and stock the kitchen with food. We find someone to prepare a culturally appropriate hot meal. You all know about the culturally appropriate hot meal. You know it's a federal government requirement. The best federal government requirement of all time, that refugees must be served a culturally appropriate hot meal soon after they arrive. We get ready, we meet them when they arrive, bundle them up again in donated clothing: hats, scarves, gloves if it's cold. We go to their apartment, avenue, they get a good night's sleep and then they come to the office. We go to the program and it is our staff that runs the program with them. “We're going to connect you to health care, and enroll the kids in school, help you learn English and help you find a job.” We do this as quickly as possible. And then we start all over again with the next family. Sometimes we receive three families in one day or several in a week.

We're happy to do it all ourselves but there is another way of resettling refugees, which is really older than the refugee act signed in 1980. And that is when community groups come together along the lines of what Jennifer described. Usually faith-based groups, churches, synagogues will say, “We want to welcome a refugee family, into our community, into our neighborhood.” And over my first ten years at IRIS, an average of about one or two groups would knock on the door and say, “IRIS, train us to welcome a family -- train us and will do it ourselves.” One or two per year. Since the end of 2015 we now have 50 groups. We have resettled over 300 refugees with about 50 groups spread all over the state.

I know some of you have seen this map that I use [pulls out map]. And my presentation wouldn't be complete without it. A map of Connecticut, a roadmap, I know some of you in your 20s don't know what roadmap is. [laughing] remember when I said, one or two groups a year, now look at all of the community groups that have stepped forward since the end of 2015. Spread all over the state, resettling more than 300 refugees. This could be, should be, happening in every state. We call it community co-sponsorship. Now, words matter and we’ve chosen the words carefully. It's a community group because it's not only a congregation. It's often a coalition, churches, synagogues, mosques, rotary clubs, book clubs, used car dealerships, stepping forward to say “We want to welcome refugees.”

The individuals come from all walks of life, retired business people, a former principal of the high school, a brain surgeon. These people bring impressive experiences and skills to the table. Yes, they need some training. Yes, they need some oversight, but we provide that and they do an amazing job of welcoming refugees. They do all those things that I describe very quickly, finding the apartment, connecting them to healthcare, helping them learn English and get each other jobs. Refugees resettled by community groups integrate faster than those resettled the usual way. These groups that have participated in welcome refugees will also understand the refugee global crisis better than the average American. They will understand the resettlement process. They will have some insight into the vetting process and they become the best educated and strongest supporters for refugee resettlement.

This program really should be implemented as a complement, not instead of, a complementary model for every refugee resettlement agency in the country. And if we did that, we could resettle many more refugees as a nation. In fact, I'll go out on a limb and say to the administration, which is just shamefully announced that the cap should be 30,000, “Increase it by another 50,000, and half of those we’ll resettled with community groups. And I'll make it my job to promote refugee resettlement by community cosponsors across the country for the next two years.”

**Matthew La Corte:** Wonderful. Jennifer, I think this is a great opportunity for you to lay out the international landscape. You've had success in countries like Argentina and the UK. Let us know the latest update with the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative and what other countries are involved in your programs.

**Jennifer Bond:** Great, thanks. I'll begin by listing the countries who have made public commitments, so obviously Canada is still at the table leading the way. But I want to stress that Canada is constantly diversifying its programs and experimenting with new models. We talk about the Canadian private sponsorship system, but actually there are five different threads underneath and I think it speaks to the diversity of the model that you can experiment with how you blend community support, private sector support, and government support in order to best meet the needs of both the newcomers and the communities.

So, we have programs that are dedicated for highly vulnerable cases. We have programs which are blended 50%, 50% responsibility between a traditional agency and the community group. We have programs where community groups are leading all of the integration, and government is there with health and education.

So, there's a lot happening in Canada and they are experimenting constantly with what policy objectives can be achieved by tweaking this model, always relying on the fundamental principle of deep citizenship empowerment. That's the key, it is about letting the citizen and the community lead as opposed to letting a professional lead and the citizens are volunteering. That's the key difference, and Canada is doing a lot in this space.

The U.K. has had a program running for approximately two years now and we see maps like the one that you’ve just seen popping up now in the UK. People are being resettled all across the country in some really interesting, remote, small communities. And I have to say that it's amazing to see the change in tone at the very local level around resettlement. Some very traditional conservative communities who are not interested in the big picture around the UK's taking in a lot of people. That's not what motivates the resettlement in some of these communities. But they are very interested in making sure that their new neighbors receive warm meals, get their kids in school, and are generally welcomed. And those experiences change what's in the church bulletin, change what’s in the local newspaper, and change the way the community as a whole is seeing the entire program. But it starts at the bottom instead of being a very top-down approach. It's been incredibly successful in the UK. They are celebrating their two-year anniversary next week, and they look forward to being there as they point out the diversity in their groups.

You've already mentioned Argentina, a very interesting example. Community-based sponsorship is allowing Argentina to become resettlement country. They are not able to do it without an infrastructure that blends community and government support. I was just in there last week, and again, lots of innovation, lots of tweaking on the margin of the model, but a very strong commitment to trying to make sure that partnership is sustainable and allows Argentina to stay engaged in the resettlement space over time.

Ireland has announced a program and they are just in the first phase of implementation. We expect a family be on the ground there in the next few weeks, which is also exciting. And they have plans, this is phase one. They're very much planning a longer-term growth and thinking about the infrastructure they need to get there.

Spain has announced a program, New Zealand is piloting a program, and Germany has recently announced a fairly large on the ground program which will be part of its bigger resettlement commitment. You can see there's diversity in regions of the world. There's also diversity in how these programs are structured. I won’t go into the specifics, but in each case, it’s citizens who are finding housing, who are furnishing the home, and who are thinking about a plan for the newcomers. They get a list. You need to think about language, think about health, education, and mental health support. You need to think about cultural connections.

In each situation, what the group does is going to be very different, both within a country and between countries, how much they pay and what they do varies. But the critical part is it’s them thinking through all the stuff and it is them leading and problem-solving together.

I will close by saying it changes the community from being a spectator, either supportive or not, you might be cheering for the newcomer, the refugee in your neighborhood, to succeed. But you’re really outside of the process. It changes you from being an observer to being a participant. And really if you're a refugee sponsor, the newcomers’ success is your success. You are deeply invested, and if the refugees failing, you as the sponsor group, are going to pivot your strategies to ensure that you do everything you can to support their success. You are not observing, you're participating, and I think that speaks to the magic of the program.

**Matthew La Corte:** Chris Gerston, your experience at ORR, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, how do you think the federal government could better cooperate with the private sector in harnessing American philanthropy and American generosity better to aid refugees?

**Chris Gerston:** I want to ask first, how many people here represent a voluntary agency? A couple. When I was director of ORR, a major effort in 1992 was to move ahead to promote privatization of the entire refugee resettlement program. I had commissioned research comparing voluntary agencies’ resettlement record in getting refugees employed and self-sufficient with state governments, San Diego with USCC was the primary example. What that research demonstrated was what my instincts told me, and what all my staff told me, was that the private voluntary agencies have a significantly and measurably better record of resettling refugees when it comes to moving them towards self-sufficiency.

When we spent a year on Capitol Hill with Senator Ted Kennedy, who had staff outside of USCC, we succeeded in getting congress to pass legislation that moved all of the cash and medical expenses from state government to the private and voluntary agencies. This passed as I was on the way out after the election that President Clinton won. The state refugee coordinators from the big states are well organized and were going to lose a handful of jobs, and they sued the federal government. I took it to the ninth circuit and it was overthrown on a technicality.

Since then, there has not been an effort like that one. But we found that the large states do a significantly worse job in refugee resettlement than the voluntary agencies, and the small states, a lot of them did a very good job. A refugee director working for a government in New Hampshire would know the refugees who were coming in on a first name basis because of the numbers. But if you’re doing refugee resettlement in New York City, and after 3 months, the refugee is not employed and passes into the welfare system. They get on the bottom of a list of 200 people a caseworker has. They get lost in the system, they no longer get that specialized attention that they would get if a voluntary agency in New York City had responsibility for those refugees.

So, the most important thing that the government could do is push the growth of voluntary agencies, mutual assistance associations, and all the community groups that the other panel members talked about. Government doesn’t do much well. Partnering with the voluntary agencies after 1980 was one of the things that the federal government did really well. I published an article in the Washington Post in 1993, “One thing the government gets right,” and the post really liked the idea. It’s hard for the federal government to interact with the state of New York and say “You’re going to have 5,000 refugees this year and here are the goals we’re setting out for you.” You can set out goals for voluntary agencies, you can negotiate, you can give the voluntary agencies flexibility. If you try to deal with a state government like Texas, New York, Pennsylvania, or California, forget about it. Those are bureaucracies similar to the bureaucracies we have in D.C., with all the issues that large bureaucracies have. Voluntary agencies, affiliates in 234 cities, don’t have the same kind of problems.

So, the most important thing is to expand the role of the private sector. There are a lot of things the government can do, but that’s the most important thing.

**Matthew La Corte**: Chris George, you have experience with this on a day to day basis. What is it about community sponsorship programs that improves the speed of integration, improves self-sufficiency. Is it that hands on community and network that refugees are resettled this way that they receive when they come here?

**Chris George**: There are a few things. One of the most important things I was told when I started doing refugee resettlement. The Senior Director at Episcopal Migration Ministry said, “Refugees need more than anything else, friends.” Might even be more important than a case manager, and there are amazing case managers out there. They need friends. A refugee family that is resettled by a community group in Litchfield County in Connecticut, a group in Salisbury, automatically arrives in this country. Thirty American friends are helping them walk their kids to school, teach them where to shop, where to catch the bus, tell them what a parent teacher conference is all about. “Don’t worry about those, those are squirrels, not rats.” “This is the best way to shovel snow, this is how you rake leaves.” “People who are running up and down the street aren’t running from snipers or roadside bombs, they’re running for exercise.”

All of this happens with refugee families who are resettled by community groups. Yes, to a certain extent it happens with our staff and with volunteers from Yale University. But there is nothing like being placed in a community and being helped by people from that community. That will speed up integration and your understanding of life in this crazy country. They’ll learn English faster because they aren’t sitting with 30 other refugee families in New Haven sipping sweet tea and speaking Arabic. They’re forced to speak English because it’s the only language in Salisbury or Ridgefield or wherever they’re placed.

We’re also seeing that women are venturing out of the homes and getting at least part-time jobs faster than refugee women who are resettled in large groups of other refugees. Why is that happening? Partially because they are surrounded by 20 or 30 other American women who are urging them or coaxing them to go out and learn English and try something different from what they’re used to in Afghanistan or Syria.

But the other side of it is, especially at a time like this, educational impact on a group of Americans working together to resettle a refugee family is awesome. There is no better way to build support for refugee resettlement than to have a program that facilitates Americans helping refugees get off to a new start and a new life in this country. We’ve done, since the early 80’s, a good job of resettling refugees. When I say “we” I mean the refugee resettlement community. But I think we realize now that we have to do a much better job of educating Americans and engaging the public in this great program. I tell my staff, “Don’t take it the wrong way, but welcoming persecuted people from all over the world and helping them start new lives in this country is too important just to be done by just a handful of staff.” We need to open it up to everybody.

**Matthew La Corte:** I will open it up to the audience for questions. You can come up to the microphone here, and please keep your questions brief.

**Audience member:** Good afternoon, I represent the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute. My question to you panel, is how long would it take for the United States as a nation to implement those community integration programs as Connecticut is doing and Canada as well?

**Chris George:** It’s happening already. Most refugee resettlement agencies have dabbled in these community co-sponsorship models. Many will be quick to say, “Of course they use volunteers,” but what makes this unique is that you are giving ownership over the process to these community groups. Many are doing this in a small way and on a small scale. It could begin immediately with a little bit of training, urging, and spreading of best practices. It’s already happening. It could really take off if we put our mind to it and recognize the advantages.

[To Jennifer] You’re working with countries who are starting from scratch, right?

**Jennifer Bond:** Yeah, thank you. I think there are two answers, one that Chris has already given. Some countries are experimenting with a model where they are just leveraging their existing infrastructure and systems to implement some version of sponsorship. There’s some exciting movement happening at the United States at the local level.

In other countries, we’re seeing a policy design process where government is working with civil society actors to co-design an entirely new resettlement stream that focuses on enabling sponsorship groups. So that takes a little bit more time. In some countries, there’s legislative reform that’s needed. But in most countries, there’s not. In most countries, it’s an administrative process that leverages existing legal infrastructure. People are already arriving in those countries. They’re already being admitted in some process that exists. It’s really about having that same entry pipeline, and reforming what the welcome looks like. Some countries are doing it very fast, from policy design to implementation. Other countries are doing a larger overhaul that takes more effort. But all the countries I’ve mentioned are welcoming, or plan to welcome refugees in the next few months. It can happen quickly if there’s will.

**Chris George**: If there’s will and if we have the numbers. This was organized before the Presidential determination number was released. But folks, that is the first step. We’ve got to increase the number of refugees coming to this country. I think the voluntary organizations involved in refugee resettlement have set the number at 75,000. I like the nice round number of 100,000. We can do it. We have the capacity and we really have the obligation. You’ve heard in the first panel that it already makes great foreign policy sense.

**Chris Gersten:** The elephant in the room today is the dramatic slashing of refugee numbers by this administration. I think the first panel talked about that. The central issue facing the refugee resettlement program is not how can we be more efficient at the local level. The central issue is how we can survive an administration that is hell bent, from top to bottom, on eliminating a refugee program and reducing immigration. The refugee policy is a stepchild of the much bigger effort from this administration to slash immigration, both legal and illegal immigration numbers, across the country. The only answer is political organization, inside the beltway first, nationwide second. And preparation for making this a program that survives.

The most dramatic thing that happens when refugee numbers are cut is that refugees are stuck in camps throughout the world who have been cleared to come, but they’re stuck. The second thing that happens is that the structure that has been built for the last 40 years is rotting on the vine. The critical structure of voluntary agencies and community organizations that have been nurtured slowly in partnership with the federal and state governments is being eviscerated. HIAS has gone from 34 states to 20 states. The same thing is true across the board. Texas has pulled out of the refugee program altogether, as have a number of states. This is an enormously successful federal program that is being cut to the bone. There needs to be an enormous political effort and some champions found on Capitol Hill, and a strategy.

If I were head of the Senate Finance Committee and I wanted to see more refugees come in, I would hold the Department of State Budget up. I would say “You’re not getting refunded until we stop talking about 15,000 refugees. We have the biggest refugee crisis in a generation and we’ve cut our responsibility by 80 percent.” It doesn’t make any sense. We have to have the numbers and the institutions that have been so painstakingly and carefully created over generations. They’ll wither and they’ll lose their best people, lose a number of cities. Then we’ll have a crisis that requires us to take people in and we won’t be prepared.

**Audience Member:** My question is for Mr. George. I’m actually a little disappointed I haven’t heard of IRIS until now. I’m actually a native of West Haven, and you’re located in New Haven.

**Chris George:** We’ve got a family in West Haven that was resettled by a community group. I’ll give you the contact name and number.

**Audience Member:** Perfect. My question is actually that you discussed how you have a lot of partnerships, from volunteer organizations to used car dealerships. How do establish these connections? What works what and doesn’t work? Do they usually reach out to you, do you usually reach out to them? Also, what parts of Connecticut are more accommodating? Is it usually the rural parts or the New Haven County areas that are more inner city and populated?

**Chris George:** All over the state. We vet these groups. These community groups are vetted. We review the application forms. These members go through background checks. We don’t just allow anyone to have contact with refugees. These are vulnerable people who have gone through a lot. And they go through an all-day training program, and there is pretty heavy oversight every step of the way.

But again, this could be happening anywhere. As much as you might like to think Connecticut is unique because you’re from Connecticut, there is support for refugee resettlement everywhere. It just needs to be facilitated. I never met anyone who, after hearing how refugees are vetted, and how the refugee program works, does not support the program. I think the point we need to make is that the administration is out of step with the American people. Let’s refer to it as the American Refugee Resettlement Program, to emphasize this is as much a part of this country as any other tradition. It’s our oldest and most noble tradition. And we can’t allow an administration to destroy it. The people need to step forward and make their feelings known.

**Jennifer Bond:** I just wanted to jump in quickly on the point, that I’m glad was raised, about the current situation here, and remind you of those numbers I mentioned.

Around the one-third of the Canadian population has been involved in some way in resettling refugees. Those people are not all refugee advocates. Most are not at all, and most are not politically mobilized on a huge range of issues. But they suddenly have a vested interest in this very small program, which over 40 years has enjoyed support from all parts of our political spectrum. It’s being introduced around the world by political parties from the right and from the left, for different reasons.

But it’s being embraced because their national politics support it. And the reason why their national politics support is because it’s driven by the people. It’s a true grassroots program that is able to bridge the global problem, the domestic political situation, and a very community driven response.

So, when I look at what’s happening here, I look at the potential of all the dots on Chris’s map. Those are people who can now help with the advocacy efforts that need to happen. So, I would encourage you to see this as not just a tool for when things are really good here, but also as a tool that can help broaden the base of support when things are tough.

**Chris George:** Again, to make the connection between people and politics. There’s a gubernatorial election in Connecticut. Imagine if the new governor of Connecticut were to issue an executive order saying “We don’t want to participate in the refugee resettlement program.” Within hours there would be thousands of people from behind all these dots gathering at the capital to protest. And that should happen in every state where there is a governor that has doubts about the Refugee Resettlement Program. How do we make that happen? Education and engagement of the public. Grassroots support for refugee resettlement, I think, is our best hope.

**Matthew La Corte:** Please join me in thanking our panelists for an excellent panel. [applause] Now Niskanen’s Kirstie De Pena will close us out with some closing remarks.

**Kristie De Pena:** Very brief remarks for those itching to get back to work. I want to thank Senator Lankford’s office for helping us coordinate the event, and for our co-sponsors, National Immigration Forum, Human Rights First, International Refugee Assistance Project, and the Conference of Catholic Bishops, Migration, and Refugee Services. I would also like to thank our fantastic panelists, Idean, Linda, Scott, Chris, Chris, and of course, Jennifer. Thank you for sharing your expertise this morning. And a huge thanks for our audience for attending. We’ll be around after the event to answer any questions you may have. You’re also free to reach out to myself or Matthew. We’re happy to make connections to the panelists to answer any questions, thoughts, dreams or concerns, after the event. Thank you again for your time and enjoy the beautiful day.