

Author: Pete Spencer at ~s2d9
Date: 11/24/97 4:57 PM
Priority: Normal
TO: Judy L. Chesser at -SADC
CC: Linda S. McMahon
CC: Roger McDonnell at ~S2A1
Subject: Hmong suicides

cc: Rob
Waxer

TO: Diana F. Hmong
Fortune
for 1:15 call
TODAY
FR: Judy

----- Message Contents -----

Judy -

I spoke with our staff in Fresno and in Sacramento.

In Fresno, our staff met with the Fresno Refugee Forum on Nov. 19. They discussed the recent suicide. The Hmong community does not view the suicide as an issue we need to address. Rather, their main concern is achieving veteran's status because it is the key to federal, state and local benefits. The Hmong community in the Fresno area seems to be satisfied that we have communicated effectively with them regarding their SSI status.

Our Hmong speaking staff in Fresno also continue to appear regularly on a Hmong radio show. Again, the current focus tends to be veteran's status. While the suicide is viewed as a horrible tragedy, the Hmong characterize it as an exception. They do not blame SSA.

In Sacramento, the area director issued a new instruction to his offices to meet with the Hmong community upon reading about the suicide. He asked our managers to express our sympathy as well as our concern that no one be misinformed. In addition, he asked them to find out what we could do to help the community. We printed fliers for distribution to the Hmong. While the SSA offices had previously established strong ties with the Hmong, they renewed their efforts to inform and counsel. In addition, our staff asked Stephen Magagnini, Sacramento Bee staff writer and author of the Nov. 9 article, to write another piece about the truth about SSI. We gave him a fact sheet and he agreed to do so. One of our staff has a very good working relationship with him. Magagnini is still working on the article. We have a call into him, but he's at a conference of the National Asian Legal Consortium which is meeting in San Francisco as I write this. We'll let you know what he tells us.

Working with the Hmong community is a special challenge because they distrust official channels. They distrust their own leaders as well. We have found that we continue to need to meet with them face-to-face.

I'll follow up with more info as it becomes available.

Pete

In mai - Can you have them re-fax the FHM.org
 next page? -
 Then give copies of whole package to:
 Rob Weiner 1280008
 Doris Matsui 1220003
 Cynthia Rice
 54815 Jack Smalligan

**FOOD STAMP
 PROGRAM
 USDA/FCS/RM. 710
 ALEXANDRIA, VA
 22302
 703-305-2454-FAX**

Fax

To: Diana Fortuna **From:** Bonny O'Neil
Fax: **Pages:** 24
Phone: **Date:** 11/20/97
Re: **CC:**
 Per our conversation

☐ Urgent ☐ For Review ☐ Please Comment ☐ Please Reply ☐ Please Recycle

• Comments:

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NAPALC

11/14 2001

cc: Yvette
Geo
Bonny

November 14, 1997

The Honorable Daniel R. Glickman
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
14th Street and Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Glickman:

I understand that our Executive Director, Karen Narasaki met you earlier this week at the White House Conference on Hate Crimes, at which time she raised with you the Department of Agriculture's decision to deny food stamps to Hmong and Lao veterans. As a follow-up to that conversation, and to our letter dated October 31, 1997, we enclose additional materials for your information. As you can see, extensive media attention has been given to this issue over the last two weeks, including the tragic story of a Hmong suicide in Sacramento, California.

Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis of California has written a letter to the Director of California's Department of Social Services, criticizing her decision to deny food stamp benefits to Hmong and Lao veterans. We have been contacted by groups in Illinois, who have indicated that their state director of social services intends to write a similar letter.

We are deeply concerned that we will lose more lives in the Hmong and Lao community absent swift action by the Department of Agriculture to reinstate food stamps for this vulnerable population. We would again request a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss this situation.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


Jayne Park
Staff Attorney

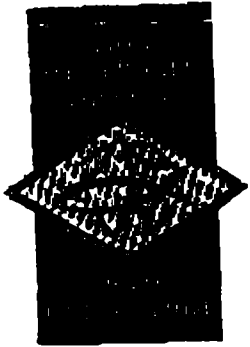
cc: Yvette Jackson, Administrator of Food and Consumer Service
Bonnie O'Neill, Acting Deputy Administrator for Food Stamp Program
Sylvia Matthews, White House Deputy Chief of Staff
Doris Matsui, White House Deputy Director for Public Liaison
Jonathan Abrams, Esq., Hogan and Hartson
Carric Lewis, Food Resource and Action Center
Brian Thao, Hmong National Development Center
Paul Herr, Southeast Asia Resources Action Center
Josh Bernstein/Dinah Wiley, National Immigration Law Center
Kay Bengston, Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs
Michael Hill/Cynthia Phillips, United States Catholic Conference

AFFILIATED

Los Angeles
Asian Pacific American
Legal Center

New York
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NOV 12 '97 02:51PM ASIAN LAW CALCLS 14153918366

P.6/24

NOV 18 '97 15:31 FR LT-GOVERNOR OFFICE 916 323-4998 TO 916 323-417215

P.84



GRAY DAVIS
 Lieutenant Governor
 State of California

November 10, 1997

Eloise Anderson, Director
 California Department of Social Services
 744 P Street
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Anderson:

I am writing to urge the State Department of Social Services to restore the benefits Hmong veterans in California recently lost and so unquestionably deserve.

During the Vietnam war, many Hmong were conscripted by the American CIA to fight against the Viet Cong. From 1962 to 1975, approximately 10,000 Hmong placed themselves in the line of fire to assist and protect American soldiers. In return, the CIA promised to take care of them in the future. Since then, Hmong courage and sacrifice while fighting under the American flag have been officially recognized by Congress. Many are now decorated war heroes, with medals and letters commemorating their bravery and valued services to the United States.

As late as 1997, Congress recognized the invaluable contribution of the Hmong to the war efforts of the United States. Section 5566 of the Balanced Budget Act clearly states: "It is the sense of Congress that Hmong...who fought on behalf of the armed forces of the United States during the Vietnam conflict...should be considered veterans for the purpose of continuing certain welfare benefits."

In April, the House Ways and Means Committee supported a resolution calling for Hmong combat veterans to be treated like other non-citizen veterans under the federal welfare reform law. This resolution, which did not seek to change the welfare reform law, declared that Hmong veterans should not lose either their Supplemental Security Income or food stamp benefits. Having fought for the United States military forces, the Hmong have earned the same rights as any other veterans.

Yet the Wilson Administration has said that a "sense of Congress" does not have the force of law, and has refused to continue food stamp benefits to Hmong veterans. As a veteran myself, I am personally offended that the State of California should fail to acknowledge the sacrifices of fellow veterans and their family members.

- ☐ State Capitol, Rm. 1114, Sacramento, CA 95814 (916) 445-4884 FAX (916) 323-4998 E-Mail: Gray.Davis@leg.ca.gov
- ☐ 243 South Grand Avenue, Suite 3040, Los Angeles, CA 90071 (213) 620-2311 FAX (213) 620-2633

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P.7/24

NOV 18 '97 15:31 FR LT-GOVERNOR OFFICE 516 3234938 TO 91208447215 P.85

I am sure you noticed the tragic story in yesterday's Sacramento Bee about the suicide of Hmong refugee Chia Yang, the wife and child of Hmong veterans who relocated to California. Yang's belief that the U.S. government had deserted her family and her consequent despair are compelling on any day, but they are particularly poignant as we prepare to honor all our veterans. In the words of Yang's husband, "It looks like the U.S. has forgotten that we have helped them."

I urge you to recognize the vital role Hmong veterans played in preserving and protecting the people of the United States, and I ask you now to restore their food stamp benefits.

Sincerely,


GRAY DAVIS

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Suicide illustrates welfare reform's toll amo...

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Breaking California news, updated throughout the day.

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Suicide illustrates welfare reform's toll among Hmong

By Stephen Magagnoli
Bee Staff Writer
(Published Nov. 9, 1997)

■ Toby Vue is shaking with anger, shaking so much he can barely talk. His mother, Chia Yang, lies on a slab in Sacramento Memorial Lawn.

On Oct. 16, the 54-year-old Hmong mother of seven hanged herself in her south Sacramento garage.

In a rambling farewell tape she tucked inside her traditional Hmong funeral clothes, Yang blamed welfare reform for pushing her over the edge. "It feels like I'm sitting in a pot of boiling water every day," Yang told her family. "What if I lose my SSI? What if my husband and children lose their AFDC grant? If they stop my grant I'm going to die anyway."

Vue, a registered nurse, promised his mother that he and his wife would care for her if she lost her \$640-a-month Supplemental Security Income grant — to no avail.

"The No. 1 reason she took her life was welfare reform has caused her so much stress she couldn't focus on anything else," he said.

Yang's trauma is shared by thousands of Hmong and Lu Mien refugees — unable to find jobs or master English — who feel increasingly helpless, useless and unwanted in the strange new world of welfare cuts, citizenship requirements and managed health care.

In Fresno two months ago, a 59-year-old Hmong woman hanged herself because she said welfare reform made her feel unwelcome in America. Earlier this year, a Hmong elder in Wisconsin hanged himself rather than become a burden to his family. Every month, refugee agencies get calls from Hmong contemplating suicide.

Yang's husband, Sua Chai Vue, is one of nearly 20,000 California Hmong between 18 and 65 who have had their food stamps cut. In the past two months, nearly 4,000 have filed food stamp appeals.

With every ounce on her 4-foot-8-inch frame, Chia Yang yearned for a better life for her children. But what set her apart from other anxious

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welfare mothers is that she and her family -- like 170,000 other Hmong and Lu Mien refugees nationwide -- are casualties of a lost war, a war they were drawn into by the CIA, a war that cost them their homeland, their dignity and their natural way of life in the mountains of Laos.

Yang, who kept an immaculate home and made sure her kids hit the books, twice tried to become a U.S. citizen -- which would have allowed her to keep receiving welfare -- but she froze each time she took her oral exam.

Ironically, the new welfare rules that helped plunge Yang into a deep depression have turned in her favor: Had Yang held on until her 55th birthday in March, she could have taken the entire test in Hmong.

For years, Hmong and Lu Mien recruited by the CIA to fight in the Vietnam War have lobbied to become U.S. veterans, who are exempt from welfare reform.

Congress has said they "should be considered veterans for purposes of continuing certain welfare benefits consistent with the exceptions provided other noncitizen veterans. . . ."

Several state administrative law judges have agreed and have ordered food stamps reinstated -- only to be overruled by Eloise Anderson, director of the state Department of Social Services.

Anderson, herself a former food stamp recipient, said, "I worked hard and got on my feet and didn't need them anymore."

She called the congressional wording "rhetorical," and said the words were never backed up with cash to keep Hmong on the program.

Added department spokeswoman Corinne Cheo, "I feel for these people; they fought and died for us. But in the era of welfare reform, the new mantra is 'work.' It's not 'what the government owes me.'"

On the wall of Chia Yang's home hangs a poster of a Hmong village not unlike her own in the central highlands of Laos.

Every day before she died, Yang talked of going home to the "land of sunshine," where a swatch of land and a good pair of hands and feet were worth more than all the computers in the world.

In 1964 she married Sua Chai Vuc, who served with two of Yang's brothers in the CIA's covert army. "I liked her best not for her looks, but for her outgoing personality," said Vuc, 58. "She was very respectful and kind."

The Hmong -- in concert with the Ravens, a secret corps of elite U.S. pilots -- held off the communists for more than a decade. But in 1973 the United States bailed out of Laos, and the outmanned Hmong resistance crumbled.

In 1975, the communists overran Laos, slaughtering thousands of Hmong. Thousands more, including Yang, her husband and six children, fled across the Mekong River and into the jungles of Thailand.

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Suicide illustrates welfare reform's toll anno...

"We walked for nine days," said her oldest son, Toby Vue, 31. "Many people died from hunger, sickness and land mines. Left and right, we passed bodies of men, women and children."

The United States had promised to take care of them, and after four years in Thai refugee camps, the Vues resettled in a two-bedroom flat in San Diego.

Like most of California's 80,000 Hmong, they came from villages with no electricity, no toilets, no locks, no lawyers, no forms to fill out, no permits to buy.

They had no written language -- most had never used a pencil -- and now they faced the gargantuan task of learning to read and write and speak in English. They came here knowing only how to farm or how to fight.

Still, America was Yang's dream come true. "She said, 'We've found freedom!' She was very proud, very happy to bring her children to a modern country where her children could attend school and maybe one day we will do some good," said Toby Vue.

While Yang grew tomatoes, corn, onions, cilantro, eggplant and pumpkins, her husband studied English and eventually got a job as a dishwasher.

And then the welfare rules changed. Those hurt most were older Hmong, nearly all of whom receive government assistance.

Yang, in her farewell tape, said she never would have come here if she'd known the U.S. government was going to change the rules and make it so hard for her to survive. "I hope I will be reborn as a smarter, healthier, more educated person, better able to help myself and others so my next family won't have to go through this," she said.

"I totally blame this on the lawmakers," said Toby Vue. "Young people like me should work. But people like my parents, they lost their country because they served this country. They can't stay in Laos because they will be executed. We have nowhere else to go."

In 1987, Yang and her family moved to Sacramento because they'd heard there were better English teachers here.

Yang lived to see two of her sons get college degrees. Toby Vue, a soft-spoken \$43,000-a-year nurse at Sutter General Hospital, has helped Hmong cancer patients overcome their fears of bone marrow transplants and chemotherapy.

But Yang's health deteriorated in Sacramento.

High blood pressure, panic attacks, diabetes, kidney stones, bladder infections, arthritis, night sweats, a stroke -- "She's a walking pathology," said her longtime doctor, Vietnamese refugee Hung Gia Hoang. "She's so fragile, and all those things put her into depression status. Depression, sadness is very common in many of my Southeast Asian patients, especially the women."

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As a disabled person, Yang qualified for SSI. At first, she could go to any doctor that accepted Medi-Cal patients.

But several years ago Medi-Cal patients were assigned to specific HMOs and specific doctors. The new rules confused many Hmong, who were afraid to go to Western doctors to begin with. "They don't know who to call for help, they don't know how to navigate the managed care system, they have no idea who their doctor is," said Hannah Yang, a Hmong worker with the Health Rights Hotline. "Most older Hmong don't read or write English," she said. "They'll drive around all day, going from medical office to medical office, to find out if they're assigned to that office to get care."

"Ninety percent of Sacramento's 15,000 Hmong are having these problems," she said. "It's a nightmare for them. Some decide not to get any health care until they have an emergency -- then they go to the emergency room."

Yang, too, was frustrated.

"She would get to the doctor's office at 7:30 a.m. to be there when they opened at 8," said Toby Vue. "Then you put your name down and wait. She'd be called into the exam room at noon. By the time the doctor got to her it would be another 2-3 hours, and the whole day is ruined."

Yang's family spent several thousand dollars on traditional Hmong healers, or shamans, and Chinese herbal medicines, but she didn't improve much.

"Maybe it's not my blood or body, maybe it's my soul," she said in her suicide tape. "It's not because you didn't love or support me -- my sadness over the (American) system and health problems drove me over the edge."

In 1996, the government's vise tightened some more -- Yang and other disabled immigrants were threatened with the loss of their SSI checks unless they became U.S. citizens.

So far, the citizenship requirement has applied only to food stamp recipients like Yang's husband, whose grant has been cut from \$185 to \$100 a month.

"It looks like the U.S. has forgotten that we have helped them," he said.

The Hmong's tragic tale is being replayed at food stamp appeal hearings throughout California.

In Marysville two weeks ago, a tearful Hmong mother threatened to kill herself and her five children if her food stamps weren't restored, said Victor Hwang, an attorney with the Asian Law Caucus of San Francisco, which represents several hundred Hmong.

"She told the judge, 'You might as well send a soldier to just kill us because that's what you're doing,'" Huang said.

A Hmong from Chico produced death certificates of 52 relatives he said were killed as a result of his family's service to the CIA.

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One Hmong veteran, whose resume includes a congressional "Defenders of Freedom" citation and 72 months in a communist re-education camp, said that before he came here, he never asked anyone for help. "Now I have to depend on my children for everything such as translating, shopping or going anywhere. My children are my parent and I am their child. I take ESL classes, but it does no good."

Not one to give up easily, Yang studied hard for her February 1996 citizenship test. She received a notice from an INS-approved testing service, Naturalization Assistance Services Inc., saying: "CONGRATULATIONS! You passed the examination!"

But because NAS had tested her in Hmong, the INS threw out the results and asked her questions in English, said INS spokeswoman Sharon Rummery, adding NAS is no longer certified to give citizenship tests.

Twice, Yang took the test at INS headquarters in Sacramento. Each time, she panicked and could barely utter a word.

Had Yang taken the test a third time, she probably would have been granted citizenship under a disability waiver that went into effect in March, Rummery said. "As long as you can indicate in any way that you understand you are taking an oath of allegiance, you can become a citizen. You don't even have to talk -- you can blink." Yang's application for a disability waiver was still being processed at the time of her death.

Yang constantly ranted about welfare reform. "Her face is turning red, she's angry, she's crying. 'We're going to starve,'" Toby Vue said. "I told her to stay alive, just be our mom, be part of our family -- don't worry about money problems, be thankful we have a place we can call home." He reminded her that all immigrants are in the same boat, "But she was helpless any way she looked at it."

On Oct. 16, after watching the late news, Yang and her husband went to bed.

"My dad woke up at 3:30 and saw my mom wasn't in bed," Toby Vue said. "He found her in the garage, hanging from a nylon rope."

"In our culture it's very hard to accept," he said. Many Hmong believe the soul of a suicide victim won't find its way back to the spirit world to be reincarnated.

At Yang's funeral, which lasted four days and drew 400 mourners, her family sacrificed seven cows to the spirit gods "to make sure her spirit won't harm us," Toby Vue said.

To prepare for her journey to the spirit world, Yang was dressed in seven layers of Hmong finery. A Hmong chanter and a Hmong bamboo flute player guided her spirit back through every place she'd ever been until she made it back to the village of her birth.

"She needs to say thank you for the water, the land and the fire she used to survive in each place," Toby Vue explained.

Yang, in her farewell message, told her family: "I'm sorry I had to bring

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you to this country and then leave you behind. Don't be angry at me . . . don't miss me too much, because even if I die my spirit will come back and help you to be strong and survive so you don't have to suffer like I did."

Toby Vue begs the government to "please reconsider -- help this poor, elderly group of people. I know my mom will not be the last. They will be happiest in death, without worrying where they are going to eat or live."

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LOCAL NEWS

The Fresno Bee

Wednesday

November 12, 1997

Hmong sues for aid as CIA veteran

■ Fresno man is seeking
food stamp benefits that
were cut off Sept. 1.

By Charles McCarthy
The Fresno Bee

A Fresno man who fought for the Central Intelligence Agency's secret army in Laos should get his food stamp benefits back because he's a U.S. veteran, he claims in a lawsuit to be filed today.

"I have been a soldier for the American CIA during the Vietnam War," said Chong Yia Yang, who spoke through an interpreter at Fresno's Legion of Valor Museum before Tuesday's Veterans Day parade.

"I am a veteran of the United States."

At issue is a new welfare law that, as of Sept. 1, cut off food stamps for legal immigrants who are not citizens. The law made exceptions for immigrants who are U.S. veterans, and that's where the

Please see Veterans, Page B3

Veteran: Hmong man sues for aid

Continued from Page B1

controversy lies — whether Hmong who fought for the CIA should be considered veterans.

The casefile evoked an angry response from the Hmong, prompting more than 3,500, including Yang, to file appeals and forcing the Department of Social Services to schedule mass hearings this month in eight counties.

Yang's lawsuit is expected to be filed today in Fresno County Superior Court. Tuesday, copies were distributed by lawyer Chris A. Schneider, executive director of Fresno-based Central California Legal Services.

Yang is suing the California Department of Social Services and its director, Elaine Anderson.

State officials could not be reached to comment Tuesday, but in the hearings said the Hmong do not have veteran status.

Yang began fighting for the CIA in 1971 at age 14.

On Sept. 8, the California Department of Social Services cut

off food stamps for his family, the lawsuit says. Yang appealed, but his appeal was denied Oct. 31, the lawsuit notes.

The denial, also shown to reporters, concluded in part that Yang and his family are legal resident aliens, but that they "do not meet any of the military or Social Security credit criteria."

No others are named in the lawsuit, but it says Yang seeks a court order restoring food stamps and other welfare benefits for himself and "all Hmong veterans" in California.

Before the parade started, Vietnam veteran Jim Miles said Hmong who really are veterans should have benefits.

"The Hmong did fight with us ... giving up their lives, too," Miles said. "They have the rights."

That opinion is apparently shared by California Lt. Gov. Gray Davis, a Vietnam veteran. Schneider distributed copies of a Nov. 10 letter from Davis to Anderson.

In the letter, Davis said 80,000 Hmong "placed themselves in the line of fire to recruit and protect American soldiers."

Davis said Congress has recognized this service and resolved that Hmong be treated like any other American veterans in eligibility for food stamps and Social Security benefits.

California has ignored that, he charged. "As a veteran myself, I am personally offended that the state of California should fail to acknowledge the sacrifices of fellow veterans and their family members," Davis said.

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are veterans, too, deserve benefits

I am not a U.S. citizen, but I was a U.S. Central Intelligence Agency soldier from 1971 to 1978. During my life, I have protected the CIA and helped the 2,000 American soldiers during the Vietnam War, I believe, to death more than working 10 years in the United States.

I came to the United States of America not because of the richness of the country but because the government and the CIA had sent me to fight in North Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh trail.

Every Hmong man, age 14 to 60 years old, was forced to join the CIA's Special Forces to fight against the North Vietnamese.

The CIA soldiers even came to our villages to set up camp with us, taking up both large and small weapons to launch against the Vietnamese without following any rules or regulations. This kind of action that the CIA soldiers took was against the law.

Hands of the white men

The Laotian and Vietnamese communists called the Hmong people the enemy and the hands, feet and mind of the white men.

Think about it! Even the American CIA could not spend capital on Vietnamese soldiers; how could we? The American government had asked the Hmong people to help them in the Vietnam War and if the Americans won the war, then both the Hmong and the American people could live in peace in Laos.

On the other hand, if the Americans lost the war, then they agreed to take all the Hmong people out of Laos to live in their country, and would make sure every Hmong would live like American citizens.

Due to this agreement, the Hmong people then joined the American soldiers in the Vietnam War. In 1978 the American soldiers left and they did not take any Hmong with them. So many of the Hmong people did not have a passport then with the U.S. government.

The Americans have taken the lives of many Hmong men, women and children taken the lives of young men, leaving mothers and fathers without a son to help them feed. And so there is no one to help them run away from the Lao communists and that is why we are still here.

Forced to fight

Americans forced the Hmong to fight the war without meeting legal military laws, illegal actions according to the laws written by the United Nations.

In 1978, I helped 10 soldiers buy a hole to get out. This hole was dug to put dead people in. These people lived here for a whole week. This hole was dug to protect them from the bullets.

My children, my wife and I were not U.S. citizens yet and even though my children are not 18 years old, my benefits have been cut off. This is cruel and inhuman.



Cheng Via Yang is a resident of Fresno. His community was troubled from the recent language.

In Laos, at 14 years old and not yet an American citizen, I was forced to fight against the North Vietnamese. This was not against American laws. Today, we come to stay in your country and it is against your laws. Think about who has done more wrong.

Why have the Americans forgotten to appreciate the Hmong people? I am telling you this if the government cuts my benefits, it is very wrong. Why didn't the government send American soldiers in to fight the North Vietnamese? And why did it force us to do the deeds? We are not just citizens but we have every right to be in this country, as everyone else does. We have every right to have AFDC benefits, as every American does.

Even today, up and down the country, Laotians are still looking for Hmong to kill because of American. Lao communists hate us Hmong very much. And don't Americans tell the Lao communists to stop killing the Hmong?

Even today, the Lao communists and Hmong are still fighting in the mountains of Laos. The American government has representatives in Laos. Why don't they help?

GAIN doesn't work

Some Hmong-American soldiers are still in the mountains of Laos but the American government ignores them. At the same time, in the United States, the Hmong soldiers are forced to lose their benefits.

A large race harboring a smaller race is considered discrimination and it is illegal in the United States. In the United States we have been forced to be in the GAIN program for a decade and more. No one has received a diploma yet.

This GAIN program creates jobs for American people, but does not educate the Hmong people. We were forced to work without pay through this GAIN program.

I hope the government will recognize the Hmong soldiers' AFDC benefits, help the soldiers who are still in Laos, respect the Hmong and recognize the good deeds that we have done to help the Americans in the past.

American citizens should appreciate and recognize my deeds and those of many other Hmong soldiers. I ask that American citizens help the Hmong soldiers and their families, so we have food on the table and have peace and freedom like American citizens.

Fresno Bee 11-8-97

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Online Opinions: Unconscionable acts 11/8/97

http://www.cjonline.com/stories/110897/opa_bureaucracy.html

P.2/2

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Thursday, November 6, 1997

Unconscionable acts

*This is government bureaucracy at its worst. Shame on all involved.*Last modified at 7:38 a.m. on Thursday, November 6, 1997

The story of the Hmong people who were used by the CIA in Vietnam and now are being denied food stamps because of welfare reform heaps shame on the U.S. government, California welfare officials and the CIA.

The CIA used these people -- in essence kidnapping them -- and now has no comment about their plight.

The Hmong, a tribal people who have had difficulty adjusting to American life, are being denied food stamps because of the provision of welfare reform that eliminated benefits for legal immigrants.

But these are more than legal immigrants; they are captives. They were forced into service for the U.S. military -- one even as young as 10. They endured all of the hardships of war, including being wounded.

And now the United States is turning its back on them. For shame!

The same goes for California welfare officials, who overturned rulings by an administrative judge that would have reinstated benefits.

The Hmong, who get another hearing before U.S. Agriculture Department officials today, have been betrayed by everyone else. Surely the USDA has a better sense of decency and fairness.

If not, the ugly American moniker certainly fits.

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OCT 28 1997 8:28PM ASIAN LAW CALOCUS 14153910355

P.2/4 P.02

No welfare, no hope



Mary A. Lomardi — The Fresno Bee

Tragic loss. Vu Xiong, above, is moved to tears discussing the death of his sister-in-law Va Vang who took her own life fearing the loss of her welfare benefits. Vang, 59, is shown in the photo below.

Immigrant takes life fearing loss of check

By Karen McAllister
The Fresno Bee

Va Vang talked about killing herself for the first time in February as the deadline neared for her to become a U.S. citizen or risk losing her welfare benefits.

Vang's relatives reassured her that they would support her regardless of whether she kept her government assistance.

As the year went on, her family made sure she knew Congress had decided to continue Supplemental Security Income benefits for legal immi-

grants last summer.

But the message didn't sink in for the 59-year-old Vang, who spoke no English, signed her name with an "X" and had dropped out of a citizenship class after only three weeks.

The Hmong immigrant remained depressed. She felt hopeless about her future in the United States.

Last month, Vang hanged herself outside the southeast Fresno home where she was a

Please see Sidebar, Page A18



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andred from Page A1
second, rather to eight nieces
and nephews.

On Sept. 13, she started out
that Fresno's Southeast Asian
community had discussed and
sored over the last year's outside
sued by the fear of welfare re-
form.

Early in 1997, Hmong leaders
said they received daily calls
from frightened older immi-
grants, some contemplating sui-
cide. The calls were scared
they'd be unable to survive un-
der the provisions of the 1996
welfare reform law.

Even now, that fear persists.
ShurVang, the city of Fresno's
senior center, said im-
migrants call or stop by his office
almost every day with questions
about the impact of welfare re-
form.

"I just give them encourage-
ment and tell them not to worry.
If I say they need to worry, they
might hang themselves," Vang
said. "I never say anything nega-
tive, that would just add more
pressure."

No other suicide in Fresno has
been linked to changes in wel-
fare laws. In at least 14 other
U.S. states, older immigrants
have committed suicide because
they worried about meeting a
burden for their families, said
Fresno immigration attorney
Leroy Lee.

What makes Vang's case dif-
ferent is that her suicide fol-
lows news that her \$540 SSI
check would still arrive each
month.

Her death came after an even-
ing of playing with her niece
and nephew, and watching tele-
vision with her sister and brother-
in-law.

She was surrounded by family
here, but her relatives say Vang
felt unwanted in the United
States after the adoption of the
federal welfare reform law in Au-
gust 1996.

Moreover, she was confused
about how the law would affect
her, whether she would be left
without cash or Medi-Cal cover-
age for her doctor visits.

Vang moved to Fresno in 1988,
ending an 18-year stay in Thai-
land's refugee camps. In Califor-
nia, she was reunited with her
brother-in-law, Vao Xiong, and
his family.

Xiong and his wife, Lia Lee,
described Vang as being "very
happy" until she started hearing
about welfare reform.

Holding a 1996 photo of Vang
standing in a Fresno garden,
Xiong said, "She was very happy
then. After this year, she did not
look happy, she looked sad. It
was so hard for her to live."

□□□

For Vang, 1997 signaled the
start of what were to be
major changes for legal
immigrants who had not become
U.S. citizens.

In August 1996, President
Clinton signed a sweeping wel-
fare reform law designed to re-
duce welfare spending, encour-
age self-sufficiency and
discourage illegal immigration.

With all of its cutbacks, the
law was estimated to save the
federal government \$50 billion to
\$58 billion over six years. The
projected savings will drop with
the rollbacks of benefits for

legal immigrants.

Among the varied provisions,
the law made non-citizens ineli-
gible for food stamps, Medicaid
and SSI, which gives cash assis-
tance to the blind, disabled and
those over 64.

For decades, legal immigrants
who were either disabled or low-
income and over 64 had been
eligible for the federal Supple-
mental Security Income pro-
gram. Vang's disability — severe
headaches and vision problems
— made her eligible for SSI.

Some immigrants had relatives
who could support them, but
many did not and were depen-
dent on the monthly benefit
checks.

Before signing the 1996 law,
Clinton took exception to the
sharp setbacks in benefits for
legal immigrants. He described
those changes as having nothing
to do with reforming welfare.

"It is simply a budget-saving
measure, and it is not right,"
Clinton said, as he promised to
later amend the immigrant pro-
visions.

Opposition to the law from im-
migrant advocates, politicians
and Clinton himself led Congress
to restore the benefits to legal
immigrants this past summer —
two months before its Oct. 1 ef-
fective date.

Local community leaders hel-
ped the vote as a victory for im-
migrants. But the report never
quite assuaged Vang's stress.
She still talked about taking
her life.

The Rev. Sharon Stanley, a di-
rector at the Fresno Internation-
al Refugee Ministries Inc.,
said Vang's case highlights the
challenges older immigrants face
who are not literate in their na-
tive language, let alone in Eng-
lish. Vang never learned to read
or write the Hmong language
and never had any schooling or
job skills training, Stanley said.

Even though her SSI benefits
were no longer at risk, Stanley
said Vang's background made it
especially tough to understand
the "whole swirl of what is hap-
pening with welfare reform."

Legislators should look at
what is happening as they shape
policy, she said, and keep in
mind the personal impact.

"Clearly [Vang's] death was a
result of depression and sadness
based on the cumulative effect of
confusion and hopelessness that
resulted from welfare reform,"
Stanley said.

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Before arriving in the Uni-
ted States in 1988, caring
for nieces and nephews
and farming fulfilled Vang's life
in Laos and then Thailand.

Vang and her husband had
one child, a boy who died at age
1. In 1978, the couple escaped
war-torn Laos and moved into a
temporary refugee camp in Thai-
land with Xiong.

With a 24-year age difference,
Xiong said Vang was like a
mother to him, and later to his
children.

Xiong lived with his brother
and Vang until 1991, when he
moved his family to Fresno.
When they left, Vang was in a
quandary.

She wanted to emigrate, to es-
cape the refugee camps, find a
better life in the United States



Mary A. Leonard — The Pro
Holding on. Lu Lee, the wife of Vao Xiong, sits with one of her c
whom Ye Vang helped care for in the home they all shared.

and be with her extended family
again. "She missed my children
so much," said Xiong, 54, who
started working in a factory in
June after five years on welfare.

But Vang's husband wanted to
return to his homeland. He had
been a soldier in Laos from 1968
to 1978 and was waiting for the
Communist government to leave
Laos.

In April 1983, Vang left her
husband and started a life in
Fresno with Vang's family. In
July 1988, Vang got word that
her husband had died in Thai-
land.

□□□

Soon after arriving in Fre-
sno, Vang told a doctor
about her headaches and
trouble with her vision.

She believed both conditions
resulted from a fall she took
while trying to deliver food to
soldiers before leaving Laos. She
also had a rash that had started
appearing on her skin about five
years earlier.

The symptoms led a doctor to
qualify Vang as "disabled," mak-
ing her eligible for Supplemental
Security Income and guarant-
ing her Medi-Cal coverage.

Vang visited the Xiong Al-
lergy and Respiratory Medical Cen-
ter in Fresno several times for
treatment of her rash over the
last year. Dr. William H. Xiong
said Vang's primary problem,
like many of his Hmong and
Laotian patients, was depression.

Xiong didn't consider the
welfare laws a contributing fac-
tor to Vang's depression. The
fundamental issue, Xiong said,
related to her isolation.

Women like Vang reveal stran-
ger signs, Xiong said. They are
away from home, and with no
English skills they fail to assimi-
late into American culture.

"Their lives are empty, har-
row," Xiong said. "In [their] pe-

triarchal society, they a
caring for children, have
and no social life."

Xiong said his sister
never talked about trying
work in Fresno. "She to
of our children. She did
about work," he said.

The prospect of studyiv
lish wasn't in Vang's plan
she started worrying ab
impact of the new laws.
She enrolled in a civi
class last March but qu
three weeks of the five
years.

Her teacher, Alinda V.
mentioned that Ye Vang
talked with in class.

When the class started
early, Alinda Vang said,
immigrants said they
thinking about killing
themselves. Vang said she ad
any suicidal thoughts
starting her lessons.

"I told them, 'We are t
we stick together,'" Vang

Xiong said his sister
would return home fr
classes feeling hopeless
didn't remember anythi
felt like she couldn't lea

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Unable to read the
paper or understan
tion news, Vang
Xiong to interpret stories.
His reports were ofte
with gossip she hear
neighbors or updates
Hmong radio station.

Vang thought the
Sharon would force her
to Laos, Xiong said, she
often he'd tell her not t

On Aug. 18, Vang r
letter from the Social
Administration and h
over to Xiong. He speak
national English but
other relatives to trans
written English.

Within a few days, X

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Mary A. Lammert — The Fresno Bee
us Xiong, sits with one of her children
the home they all shared.

triarchal society, they are only caring for children, have no jobs and no social life."

Xiong said his sister-in-law never talked about trying to find work in Fresno. "She took care of our children. She didn't talk about work," he said.

The prospect of studying English wasn't in Vang's plan. Until she started worrying about the impact of the new welfare law. She enrolled in a citizenship class last March but quit after three weeks of the five-month course.

Her teacher, Alinda Vang, remembered that Ye Vang didn't talk much in class.

When the class started in February, Alinda Vang said, a lot of immigrants said they were thinking about killing themselves. Vang said she addressed any suicidal thoughts before starting her lessons.

"I told them, 'We are Hmong, we stick together,'" Vang said.

Xiong said his sister-in-law would return home from her classes feeling hopeless. "She didn't remember anything. She felt like she couldn't learn."

Unable to read the newspaper or understand television news, Vang relied on Xiong to interpret stories for her. His reports were often mixed with gossip she heard from neighbors or updates from a Hmong radio station.

Vang thought the United States would force her to return to Laos, Xiong said, despite how often he'd tell her not to worry.

On Aug. 18, Vang received a letter from the Social Security Administration and handed it over to Xiong. He speaks conversational English but turns to other relatives to translate most written English.

Within a few days, Xiong gave

Key phone numbers

Fresno County Mental Health Department has a 24-hour suicide hot line: 453-8846. Shur Vangyi, the city of Fresno's assistant ambassador, can be reached at 458-1848.

For questions about Supplemental Security Income benefits, call the Social Security Administration Fresno district office: 487-8081.

For questions about welfare reform, elected officials can be reached at the following numbers:

- Sen. Barbara Boxer: (909) 224-3343 or local office 487-8109.
- Sen. Dianne Feinstein: (202) 324-3841 or local office 485-7430.
- U.S. Rep. Gary Condit: (202) 225-6121 or Merced office 383-4458 or (909) 388-8424.
- U.S. Rep. George Radanovich: (202) 225-4240 or local office 248-0800 or (909) 248-0180.
- U.S. Rep. Cal Dooley: (202) 225-3341 or Hanford office 582-8171 or (809) 464-4384.

"I just give them encouragement and tell them not to worry. If I say they need to worry, they might hang themselves."

— Shur Vangyi, Fresno assistant ambassador

his sister-in-law the good news that she wouldn't lose her benefits. "She didn't believe it," Xiong said.

The Social Security Administration sends letters in Spanish, Vietnamese, Lao, Chinese and Russian, among other languages — but not Hmong, said Bobbie Summers, operations supervisor at the administration's Fresno office.

Summers has been told that the national office makes letters available in Hmong, Summers said. No decision has been made on the issue, she said.

Administration employees have discussed the welfare law with immigration reform groups and refugee assistance organizations in Fresno and surrounding counties, Fresno district manager Claudia Carlson said. And an administration representative has spoken on a Hmong radio program twice to answer questions about the law, she said.

"It's a horrible thing that happened to [Vang]," Carlson said. "Obviously there is no way we can reach everybody. We hope that people aren't so isolated, that they could call on other people to help them read the notices." Charles Vang, who hosts a Hmong radio show on KQRP (900 AM), said some of Ye Vang's doubts may have come from misinformation spread by an advertisement broadcast on the station last spring.

The ad, which ran on several programs including Charles Vang's, said immigrants could keep their welfare benefits only if they hired an attorney. The ad run by a local consultant group, was pulled after three or four weeks, Vang said.

Charles Vang also suggested that cultural differences may have led to Ye Vang's confusion. Charles Vang said he and Ye Vang grew up in a country where residents didn't question a decision from the government.

"In our country, if you disagree something from the government, there is no other way to go back and ask the government to study it. You don't challenge the government in Laos," Vang said.

On Sept. 10, Ye Vang got another letter from the Social Security Administration, this one regarding her Medi-Cal coverage. Again, she gave the letter to Xiong, and he promised to have it translated.

Three days later, Xiong and his 14-year-old son were preparing for an early morning trip to Beaver Lake. They were going squirrel hunting, and Xiong needed another water bottle before heading north at about 5 a.m.

Xiong knew he could find an empty bottle outside near his patio door. Before he could grab the bottle, Xiong noticed Ye Vang in a sitting position against a wooden bed frame that had been turned on its side against the house. A black nylon stocking tied her neck to the bed post.

His son ran inside the house, crying and screaming for his mother.

Xiong rushed into the house, grabbed a kitchen knife and cut the stocking. He put his hand on Ye Vang's heart. "It was still warm but not beating."

Fresno police responded and tried to resuscitate her. When police asked why she would commit suicide, Xiong produced the letter from the Social Security Administration.

According to the police report, Xiong told a police officer, "She was very upset and emotional about losing her benefits." Xiong said last week that he had never gotten a chance to have the letter translated before Ye Vang killed herself. He only knew that it related to Medi-Cal. The police have taken the letter as part of their investigation.

And there would be one more letter sent from the Social Security Administration, this one arriving at Xiong's home less than three weeks after Ye Vang's death.

The letter detailed what Xiong should do if Vang owed money to the federal government.

The letter's summary paragraph stated: "Uncashed checks should be returned."

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4TH STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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Capital Times (Madison, WI.)

September 24, 1997, Wednesday. ALL EDITIONS

SECTION: Editorial, Pg. 3A, GUEST COLUMN

LENGTH: 833 words

HEADLINE: U.S. SHOULD HONOR PROMISES TO HMONG

BYLINE: John Duffy

BODY:

Shoua Xiong, a HMONG man from Laos now living in Wisconsin, was 10 years old when his father was killed in a battle with communist troops during the Vietnam War.

At age 14, Yang was enlisted in the CIA-backed "Secret Army" to fight North Vietnamese troops and to rescue American fighter pilots shot down over Laos.

As a child soldier on the front lines, Xiong participated in numerous battle and rescue operations. He recalls the day that 40 HMONG soldiers were sent to rescue a CIA pilot who had been shot down by communist forces. "We had no choice," Xiong has written in a personal memoir, "but to save the life of the most precious CIA pilot. . . . Our orders were clear and specific that we should sacrifice our lives for the pilot, no matter how heavy the casualties might be."

During that mission, Xiong and HMONG troops were ambushed by enemy soldiers. The downed pilot was saved, but only 24 HMONG returned, many of them badly wounded.

At its peak, the "Secret Army" of Laos numbered about 40,000 men, most of them HMONG. The HMONG force was kept secret from the American public because the United States had pledged to respect Laotian neutrality during the Vietnam War. Rather than keeping its agreements, however, the United States secretly armed and trained the HMONG to fight Laotian and North Vietnamese communists.

Although the HMONG were widely regarded as an effective fighting force, they paid a terrible price. As many as 17,000 HMONG soldiers and 50,000 civilians were killed in the conflict, according to one source. More than 100,000 HMONG were forced to leave Laos as refugees.

Today, the sacrifices of Shoua Xiong and other HMONG veterans are being honored at a ceremony at the State Capitol. The "Wisconsin Lao Veterans Day of Recognition" is an observance of the service of the estimated 4,000 HMONG and other Lao veterans now living in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin ceremony follows a national ceremony that took place May 14 in Washington, D.C., to honor HMONG veterans across the United States.

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Capital Times (Madison, WI.), September 24, 1997

These tributes are important and long overdue. But they are not enough.

Today, many Hmong veterans and their families continue to contend with language barriers, underemployment and emotional stress. Men and women who survived a horribly destructive U.S.-sponsored war in their homeland now find themselves unable to support their families or become economically self-sufficient in this country.

The passage of 1996 federal welfare reform law and Wisconsin's W-2 programs have exacerbated these difficulties by cutting back on benefits to all low-income people, undermining the already tenuous economic position of many Hmong and their families.

On the federal level, one concrete step that can be taken to address these issues is to expedite immediate citizenship for Hmong veterans and their families, which would restore at least some of the benefits that have been reduced by the federal legislation.

In Congress, Bruce Vento has sponsored a bill -- the Hmong Veterans Naturalization Act (H.R. 371) -- that would waive the English language requirements for Hmong who served in the CIA army and for their spouses and widows. The waiver of the English language test is an important provision for Hmong people whose educational opportunities were severely compromised by the war in Southeast Asia and its aftermath.

The Vento bill would also waive the five-year residency requirement for citizenship. While many Hmong have been in this country for more than five years, others lived in refugee camps or were incarcerated for years in communist "re-education" centers. The effect of the Vento bill would make naturalization requirements for Hmong veterans commensurate with requirements for other non-citizens who served with the U.S. military, such as Filipino veterans who fought in World War II.

These are not perfect solutions. Vento's bill, which has been co-sponsored by Rep. Scott Klug, R-Madison, would not make the Hmong eligible for U.S. veterans benefits -- which the Hmong fully deserve -- or provide for Hmong veterans who have not yet come to the United States. But the bill would be an important step toward assisting Hmong veterans who wish to contribute as U.S. citizens to the cultural and economic life of their new country.

Shoua Xiong and other Hmong still recall a promise made by the CIA that America would take care of the Hmong if the United States somehow lost the war against communism in Southeast Asia. Recent welfare legislation on the federal and state levels has threatened Hmong families and made it difficult for many Hmong to see how the United States is keeping that promise.

One way for the United States to respond to the difficulties facing Hmong veterans is to grant immediate citizenship to the veterans and their families. That would be one way of repaying the men and women who gathered at the State Capitol to remember the role of the Hmong and other Laotians in an American war.

NOTES:

John Duffy of Cottage Grove began working with the Hmong in 1983 as an English teacher in a refugee camp in the Philippines. From 1990 to 1993, he worked as an educational advocate with the Hmong in Wausau. He is currently writing his

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Capital Times (Madison, WI.), September 24, 1997

doctoral dissertation at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Hmong literacy.

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Los Angeles Times

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1997

A3

California and the West

Hmong Seek Exemption From Food Stamp Cuts

■ **Welfare:** Refugees who fought in secret CIA army say those actions entitle them to veteran status. State officials disagree.

By VIRGINIA ELLES
TIMES STAFF WRITER

SACRAMENTO—In a provocative playback of the bloodiest years of the Vietnam War, hundreds of impoverished Hmong refugees argued in hearing rooms throughout California last week that service in the CIA's secret army in Laos should save them from food stamp cuts mandated by welfare reform.

But state officials, after behind-the-scenes consultations with the Clinton administration, began rejecting the appeals, contending that Congress had provided no legal avenue to exempt former Hmong fighters and their families from the cuts.

"Unfortunately, while we empathize with this population, Congress made no specific provisions to allow them to continue receiving food stamps," said Corinne Chen, a state Department of Social Services official.

The Hmong were among an estimated 100,000 legal immigrants in California slated to be cut off from food stamps Sept. 1 under the 1996 federal welfare reform act, which made noncitizens ineligible. The law made exceptions for those immigrants who were U.S. veterans or could prove they had worked 10 years in this country.

The cutoff evoked an angry response from the Hmong, prompting over 3,500 to file appeals and forcing the department to quickly schedule mass hearings in Fresno, Los Angeles, Sacramento,

Yuba, Alameda, Butte, San Joaquin and Orange counties. Officials have no statistics on the total number of Hmong who lost their food stamps but estimates run as high as 20,000.

In halting English, they insisted they were entitled to veteran status because they had spilled their blood for the American CIA in Laos. They told what one administrative law judge called "emotional and heart-wrenching" stories of leaving wives and children to fight for the Americans, of losing loved ones in the war and then, when it was over, of harrowing escapes from the communist victors.

"There was a promise [that] if we lost the war, the United States was going to take care of us," said Yee Xiong, spokesman for the California Statewide Lao Hmong Coalition. "These people are just basically trying to survive and now they are being cut off from food stamps."

The plight of the Hmong reopened a disquieting chapter in U.S. history and reignited the debate over how far this country should go to fulfill its obligations to native peoples who were recruited to fight in its wars.

It also illustrates some of the pitfalls in the welfare reform law designed to push recipients into the workplace and encourage legal immigrants to obtain citizenship.

In the hearings, the Hmong brought tailored evidence of the services their families provided the CIA during the turbulent 1960s, when America was waging a secret war that for nearly a decade helped keep the Communist North Vietnamese from seeking Laos as a highway to South Vietnam.

One man brought the death certificates of 40 relatives he said had perished fighting in the American war. A woman had a yellowed photograph

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IMMIGRANT REFUGEES SEEK Exemption From Aid Cuts

Continued from A3

showing men in fatigues surrounding a helicopter.

"That's my husband," she told an administrative law judge, pointing to one of the figures.

The food stamp cuts apply to adults between 18 and 60. Although no longer eligible for federal food stamps, children and the elderly can continue to get assistance through a state program.

The Hmong immigrated to this country beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s after fleeing to Thailand to escape persecution as U.S. sympathizers. About half of the 160,000 Hmong now living in this country settled in California; most of the rest migrated to Minnesota and Wisconsin.

For many of the Hmong who were illiterate in their own language, the inability to master English has been an insurmountable barrier to citizenship. And the lack of marketable skills and their tendency to live in rural areas where jobs are scarce have kept most of the adults out of the workplace.

Congress suggested in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 that it was not its intent to deny benefits to the Hmong who had fought for the CIA. Inserted in the act was the statement: "It is the sense of the Congress that Hmong . . . who fought on behalf of the armed forces of the United States during the Vietnam conflict . . . should be considered veterans for purposes of continuing certain welfare benefits."

But the Clinton and Wilson administrations have taken the position that the statement has no force of law.

"It was the consensus that this language was not binding at all and really basically had no effect," Choe said. "It is a very confusing and misleading statement and in our opinion has no substantive effect."

She noted that the statement does not specify what types of benefits should be preserved, nor the definition of a veteran.

Lawyers for the Hmong complain that the two administrations have chosen a hard-line approach to the Hmong when they could have used the congressional statement as authority for granting exemptions from the cuts.

"Certainly a sense of Congress is not as binding as something that says 'you must do this,' but it is clear legislative direction is an agency," said Jayne Park, staff attorney for

the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium. "The fact that they haven't chosen that option is really very troubling."

One of the state's administrative law judges who conducted several of the hearings agreed with her reasoning and found in favor of Hmong in a series of proposed orders. Judge Bruce Yurman said Congress could have been silent on the issue but the statement regarding the Hmong showed that it considered them war veterans and intended to keep them eligible for food stamps.

However, he was overruled by Elaine Anderson, director of the state Department of Social Services. She found his ruling to be inconsistent with a U.S. Department of Agriculture directive "which concludes there is no specific authority to grant such veteran status to this group for food stamp program purposes."

Vietor Hwang, staff attorney with the nonprofit Asian Law Caucus, said he is researching the law to determine if there are grounds for a class-action lawsuit on behalf of the Hmong. In the meantime, with volunteer help from UC Davis law students, he said his group is assisting the Hmong with their appeals of the cuts.

"The Hmong should have a special dispensation," said Ernest Velasquez, former welfare director in Fresno County, home to the nation's largest Hmong community. "The reality is, this wasn't their war. We brought the war to them. We recruited them. We made them our secret army and now all of a sudden we aren't even going to give them food stamps."

It is an argument that the Hmong presented to the hearing examiners.

"I came to the United States because my father fought for the CIA . . . My family supported the Americans," one mother of seven said in a written statement. "As such, my family, like thousands of other Hmong, could not remain in Laos. . . . We were targeted to be persecuted and massacred."

Another told of the hardships of adjusting to life in America. "I was a farmer for most of my life and worked with my bare hands. I have never asked anyone for assistance," an interpreter wrote for one man. "Now I have to depend on my children for everything such as translating, shopping or going anywhere. My children are my parent and I am their child."

A-12 Sunday, November 2, 1997
The Kansas City Star

NATION

Hmong people seek exemption from law cutting welfare

The immigrants, now residing in California, argue they, like Filipinos, are veterans of U.S. military.

By JOHN HOWARD
The Associated Press

CHICO, Calif. — Chia Yue Yang was 10 when he was snatched from his Laotian village, boarded into a CIA helicopter and flown to a jungle base. He spent the next decade cooking, loading ammo and killing for the United States in the Vietnam War.

"They called me a 'conscript.' I was just 10 years old; what do I know?" said Chia, a Hmong mountain tribesman. "I went to the front lines. I cook, I wash clothes, I learn how to fight. I use a machine gun. Every so often, the CIA guy, Jerry Daniels, comes by and inspects. He says, 'Don't worry, I'll take care of you.' We believe Jerry."

Now, they feel betrayed. Administrative judges and welfare authorities are hearing the formal pleas of the Hmong, who were told last month their food stamps would be cut off in accordance

with the new federal welfare reform law. The law, signed by President Clinton last year, eliminated benefits for legal immigrants on the theory that only citizens should receive such privileges.

The Hmong say they are veterans of U.S. military forces and thus should be exempt from the cutoff. Filipinos who fought for the United States in World War II were given veterans' status, they say. So why not the Hmong?

Hmong leaders plan to plead their case Thursday in Washington at the U.S. Agriculture Department, which administers the federal food stamp program.

Twenty-two years after U.S. forces left Vietnam, an eerie picture of the terror and death of that Southeast Asian war is emerging in an unlikely setting: the drab, institutional hearing rooms of California's county welfare offices.

"I was in a position of great danger," said a Hmong woman, speaking through an interpreter. The

woman allowed a reporter to attend her confidential hearing before Yuba County Administrative Law Judge Robert Fugina on condition she not be identified.

Recruited by the CIA in the early 1970s, she served as a nurse, ministering to wounded combat troops and downed U.S. fliers. Her husband, also pressed into service, fought nearby in a CIA-led combat unit.

After the war, people began informing on their neighbors to curry favor with the victors.

"Everybody knew that someone like me and my husband would be killed because we worked for them (CIA)," she said. She and her husband fled, eventually reaching a refugee camp in Thailand, from which Americans helped arrange passage to the United States.

"It will be very hard for me. Please do not cut off my food stamps," the mother of four told Fugina, who later approved her appeal.

State welfare officials, however, have since overruled Fugina, as well as other judges who ruled in favor of the Hmong. The state says

"...the CIA didn't teach you how to speak English, they taught you how to shoot a gun and kill. These people might not survive without help from the government."

—Blong Lo

the language of the federal law leaves them no choice.

The law acknowledges it is "the sense of Congress" that the Hmong should not be penalized by the reforms. But the law itself leaves less room for compassion, the state officials say.

"The CIA said it would take care of us," said Blong Lo, a Hmong community leader in Chico. "But the CIA didn't teach you how to speak English, they taught you how to shoot a gun and kill. These people might not survive without help from the government."

CIA spokesman Mark Mans-

field, asked about the Hmong's belief in CIA promises, declined to comment.

About 3,600 Hmong appeals were filed in Fresno, Butte, Alameda, Orange, Los Angeles, Sacramento and Yuba counties, where most of California's Hmong live. Asian legal advocates say several thousand more may be affected by the cutoff but have not challenged the law because they are leery of officialdom.

About two-thirds of the cases have been resolved, most of them against the Hmong; the remainder are pending.

In Minnesota, which also has a substantial Hmong population, legislation enables recipients to recoup some of the lost benefits. California has approved a similar, temporary program to continue food stamps for children and the elderly.

"That leaves the able-bodied, and they can find jobs or become citizens," said Connie Choe, a spokeswoman for the California Department of Social Services.

The Hmong are one of several ethnically distinct tribes, given the blanket term Montignard by the

French colonialists, inhabiting the highlands of Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma and southern China.

That the Hmong fought, and died, for the Americans in Southeast Asia is widely known. The Hmong were recruited by Laotian or Vietnamese soldiers — sometimes voluntarily, but usually not — and placed in military units subject to the orders of American CIA officers.

But the Hmong have little or no documentation and what they have is the confusing, often incomplete paperwork issued by Laotian or Vietnamese authorities.

And the Hmong — clannish and accustomed to an agricultural environment — have had difficulty adjusting. English has proven hard to master. Until the 1950s, the Hmong had no printed language.

Over the years, elder Hmong have had a particularly hard time assimilating into American society. For many of them, welfare is a crucial lifeline.

"I can breathe and I'm still alive," said Chong Lee Chue, 64. "But everything else is gone. The soul is gone."

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Hmong refugees say U.S. broke vow to care for them

Allies in Indochina war assail loss of food stamps

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICO, Calif. — Chia Vue Yang was 10 when he was snatched from his Laotian village, bundled into a CIA helicopter and flown to a jungle base. He spent the next decade cooking, tending ammunition and killing for the United States in the Vietnam War.

"They called me a 'conscript.' I was just 10 years old — what do I know?" said Chia, a Hmong mountain tribesman. "I went to the front lines. I cook, I wash clothes, I learn how to fight. I use a machine gun. Every so often, the CIA guy, Jerry Daniels, comes by and inspects. He says, 'Don't worry, I'll take care of you.' We believe Jerry."

Now, he feels betrayed.

Administrative judges and welfare authorities are hearing the formal pleas of the Hmong, who were told last month that their food stamps would be cut off in accordance with the new federal welfare reform law.

The law, signed by President Clinton last year, eliminated benefits for immigrants on the theory that only citizens should receive such privileges.

The Hmong say they are veterans of U.S. military forces and thus should be exempt from the cutoff. Filipinos who fought for the United States in World War II were given veterans' status, they say — why not the Hmong?

Hmong leaders plan to plead their case Thursday in Washington at the U.S. Agriculture Department, which administers the federal food stamp program.

"The CIA said it would take care of us," said Blong Lo, a Hmong community leader in Chico. "But the CIA didn't teach you how to speak English; they taught you how to shoot a gun and kill. Those people might not survive without help from the government."

Mark Mansfield, the CIA spokesman, declined to comment on Hmong allegations about the agency's promises.

About 3,600 Hmong appeals were filed in Fresno, Butte, Alameda, Orange, Los Angeles, Sacramento and Yuba counties, where most of California's Hmong live. Asian legal advocates say several thousand more may be affected by the cutoff but have not challenged the law because they are leery of officialdom.

About two-thirds of the cases have been resolved, most of them against the Hmong; the remainder are pending.

In Minnesota, which also has a substantial Hmong population, legislation enables recipients to recoup some of the lost benefits. California has approved a similar, temporary program to continue food stamps for children and the elderly.

That the Hmong fought, and died, for the United States in Southeast Asia is widely known.

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The Hmong were recruited by Laotian or South Vietnamese soldiers -- sometimes voluntarily -- and placed in military units subject to the orders of American CIA officers.

But the Hmong have little or no documentation, and what they have is the confusing, often incomplete paperwork issued by Laotian or Vietnamese authorities.

And the Hmong -- clanish and accustomed to farming -- have had difficulty adjusting. It has been a struggle for them to enter mainstream American life, and English has proved hard to master. Until the 1950s, the Hmong had no printed language.

Originally Published on 11/02/97

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H.R.2015

Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (Enrolled Bill (Sent to President))

CHAPTER 4--RESTRICTING WELFARE AND PUBLIC BENEFITS FOR ALIENS

Subchapter A--Eligibility for Federal Benefits

SEC. 5561. ALIEN ELIGIBILITY FOR FEDERAL BENEFITS: LIMITED APPLICATION TO MEDICARE AND BENEFITS UNDER THE RAILROAD RETIREMENT ACT.

(a) LIMITED APPLICATION TO MEDICARE- Section 401(b) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1611(b)) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(3) Subsection (a) shall not apply to any benefit payable under title XVIII of the Social Security Act (relating to the medicare program) to an alien who is lawfully present in the United States as determined by the Attorney General and, with respect to benefits payable under part A of such title, who was authorized to be employed with respect to any wages attributable to employment which are counted for purposes of eligibility for such benefits.”.

(b) LIMITED APPLICATION TO BENEFITS UNDER THE RAILROAD RETIREMENT ACT- Section 401(b) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1611(b)) (as amended by subsection (a)) is amended by inserting at the end the following:

“(4) Subsection (a) shall not apply to any benefit payable under the Railroad Retirement Act of 1974 or the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act to an alien who is lawfully present in the United States as determined by the Attorney General or to an alien residing outside the United States.”.

SEC. 5562. EXCEPTIONS TO BENEFIT LIMITATIONS: CORRECTIONS TO REFERENCE CONCERNING ALIENS WHOSE DEPORTATION IS WITHHELD.

Sections 402(a)(2)(A), 402(b)(2)(A), 403(b)(1)(C), 412(b)(1)(C), and 431(b)(5) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1612(a)(2)(A), 1612(b)(2)(A), 1613(b)(1)(C), 1622(b)(1)(C), and 1641(b)(5)) as amended by this Act are each amended by striking “section 243(h) of such Act” each place it appears and inserting “section 243(h) of such Act (as in effect immediately before the effective date of section 307 of division C of Public Law 104-208) or section 241(b)(3) of such Act (as amended by section 305(a) of

SEC. 5563. VETERANS EXCEPTION: APPLICATION OF MINIMUM ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE REQUIREMENT; EXTENSION TO UNREMARRIED SURVIVING SPOUSE; EXPANDED DEFINITION OF VETERAN.

(a) APPLICATION OF MINIMUM ACTIVE DUTY SERVICE REQUIREMENT- Sections 402(a)(2)(C)(i), 402(b)(2)(C)(i), 403(b)(2)(A), and 412(b)(3)(A) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1612(a)(2)(C)(i), 1612(b)(2)(C)(i), 1613(b)(2)(A), and 1622(b)(3)(A)) are each amended by inserting 'and who fulfills the minimum active-duty service requirements of section 5303A(d) of title 38, United States Code' after 'alienage'.

(b) EXCEPTION APPLICABLE TO UNREMARRIED SURVIVING SPOUSE- Sections 402(a)(2)(C)(iii), 402(b)(2)(C)(iii), 403(b)(2)(C), and 412(b)(3)(C) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1612(a)(2)(C)(iii), 1612(b)(2)(C)(iii), 1613(b)(2)(C), and 1622(b)(3)(C)) are each amended by inserting before the period 'or the unmarried surviving spouse of an individual described in clause (i) or (ii) who is deceased if the marriage fulfills the requirements of section 1304 of title 38, United States Code'.

(c) EXPANDED DEFINITION OF VETERAN- Sections 402(a)(2)(C)(i), 402(b)(2)(C)(i), 403(b)(2)(A), and 412(b)(3)(A) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1612(a)(2)(C)(i), 1612(b)(2)(C)(i), 1613(b)(2)(A), and 1622(b)(3)(A)) are each amended by inserting ', 1101, or 1301, or as described in section 107' after 'section 101'.

SEC. 5564. NOTIFICATION CONCERNING ALIENS NOT LAWFULLY PRESENT: CORRECTION OF TERMINOLOGY.

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H.R.2015

Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (Enrolled Bill (Sent to President))

SEC. 5564. NOTIFICATION CONCERNING ALIENS NOT LAWFULLY PRESENT: CORRECTION OF TERMINOLOGY.

Section 1631(e)(9) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1383(e)(9)) and section 27 of the United States Housing Act of 1937, as added by section 404 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, are each amended by striking 'unlawfully in the United States' each place it appears and inserting 'not lawfully present in the United States'.

SEC. 5565. FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES: CONTRACTS AND LICENSES.

Sections 401(c)(2)(A) and 411(c)(2)(A) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1611(c)(2)(A) and 1621(c)(2)(A)) are each amended by inserting before the semicolon at the end ', or to a citizen of a freely associated state, if section 141 of the applicable compact of free association approved in Public Law 99-239 or 99-658 (or a successor provision) is in effect'.

SEC. 5566. CONGRESSIONAL STATEMENT REGARDING BENEFITS FOR HMONG AND OTHER HIGHLAND LAO VETERANS.

(a) FINDINGS- The Congress makes the following findings:

- (1) Hmong and other Highland Lao tribal peoples were recruited, armed, trained, and funded for military operations by the United States Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, Department of State, and Agency for International Development to further United States national security interests during the Vietnam conflict.
- (2) Hmong and other Highland Lao tribal forces sacrificed their own lives and saved the lives of American military personnel by rescuing downed American pilots and aircrews and by engaging and successfully fighting North Vietnamese troops.
- (3) Thousands of Hmong and other Highland Lao veterans who fought in special guerilla units on behalf of the United States during the Vietnam conflict, along with their families, have been lawfully admitted to the United States in recent years.
- (4) The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193), the new national welfare reform law, restricts certain welfare benefits for noncitizens of the United States and the exceptions for noncitizen veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States do not extend to Hmong veterans of the Vietnam conflict era, making Hmong veterans and their families receiving certain welfare benefits subject to restrictions despite their military service on behalf of the United States.

(b) CONGRESSIONAL STATEMENT- It is the sense of the Congress that Hmong and other Highland Lao veterans who fought on behalf of the Armed Forces of the United States during the Vietnam conflict and have lawfully been admitted to the United States for permanent residence should be considered veterans for purposes of continuing certain welfare benefits consistent with the exceptions provided other noncitizen veterans under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

Subchapter B--General Provisions

SEC. 5571. DETERMINATION OF TREATMENT OF BATTERED ALIENS AS QUALIFIED ALIENS; INCLUSION OF ALIEN CHILD OF BATTERED PARENT AS QUALIFIED ALIEN.

(a) DETERMINATION OF STATUS BY AGENCY PROVIDING BENEFITS- Section 431 of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1641) is amended in subsections (c)(1)(A) and (c)(2)(A) by striking 'Attorney General, which opinion is not subject to review by any court)' each place it appears and inserting 'agency providing such benefits)'.

(b) GUIDANCE ISSUED BY ATTORNEY GENERAL.- Section 431(c) of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (8 U.S.C. 1641(c)) is amended by adding at the end the following new undesignated paragraph:

'After consultation with the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and Housing and Urban Development, the Commissioner of Social Security, and with the heads of such Federal agencies administering benefits as the Attorney General considers appropriate, the Attorney General shall issue guidance (in the Attorney General's sole and unreviewable discretion) for purposes of this subsection and section 421(f), concerning the meaning of the terms 'battery' and 'extreme cruelty', and the standards and methods to be used for determining whether a substantial connection exists between battery or cruelty suffered and an individual's need for benefits under a specific Federal, State, or local program.'

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October 31, 1997

The Honorable Daniel R. Glickman
Secretary of Agriculture
Department of Agriculture
14th Street and Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Glickman:

The National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to advancing the legal and civil rights of the nation's 8.8 million Asian Pacific Americans. We are affiliated with the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco, the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California in Los Angeles, and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York. We are writing to express our concerns over the Department of Agriculture's current interpretation of a provision contained in the 1997 Balanced Budget Act relating to public benefits for Hmong and Highland Lao veterans.

As you are aware, the Balanced Budget Act restored Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid for certain legal immigrants who were denied these benefits under the welfare reform act signed into law last August. Unfortunately, food stamps were not reinstated for legal immigrants. However, in Section 5566 of the Balanced Budget Act, Congress clearly expressed its intent that Hmong and other Highland Lao veterans should be considered veterans for purposes of continuing all welfare benefits, consistent with the exceptions provided other noncitizen veterans under the welfare reform law.

You may also be aware that President Clinton committed from the outset to work to mitigate the harsh immigrant provisions in the welfare law passed last year. Yet, the Department of Agriculture has ignored this clear direction from both Congress and the President, issuing an Administrative Notice stating that Hmong and Lao veterans are not veterans for purposes of the welfare law, and are therefore ineligible for food stamps. The Department's actions are a clear violation of Congressional intent and direction under Section 5566, and the President's commitment. This unnecessary interpretation will result in approximately 10,000 - 20,000 Hmong and Lao individuals and families going hungry.

Our San Francisco affiliate has been involved in a series of administrative appeals in Yuba County in which they represent Hmong veterans who have been terminated from food stamps. An administrative law judge with the California Department of Social Services recently issued a decision that pursuant to Section 5566, Hmong veterans are considered veterans for purposes of continuing their food stamp benefits. Specifically, he found that:

*To Jack Smalligan
for Draft
Call me.
cc Rob Weiner
Krom Dzung Fortuna*

AFFILIATES
Los Angeles
Asian Pacific American
Legal Center
New York
Asian American Legal
Defense & Education Fund
San Francisco

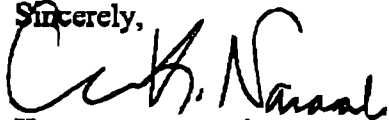
"Congress could have chosen to be silent on the issue of continuing eligibility for Hmong and Highland Lao individuals ... Based upon the significant Congressional findings contained in Section 5566(a), the intent of Congress to expand eligibility to Hmong and Highland Lao veterans is clearly expressed in Section 5566(b) ... The purpose of the Food Stamp Program is to provide food to eligible needy individuals on a current and timely basis. Hunger cannot be postponed. Therefore, a reasonable statutory construction of the language contained in the Balanced Budget Act ... is to presently continue eligibility for Food Stamps for those qualified Hmong and Highland Lao veterans and spouses and unmarried dependent children of such veterans as otherwise defined and authorized in the [welfare reform act]."

It is our understanding that based on instructions from agency officials at the Department of Agriculture, the Director of California's Department of Social Services reversed the administrative judge's ruling.

Overwhelming, bipartisan support exists for Hmong and Lao veterans because of the great service and sacrifices they made for this country. On May 12, 1996, bipartisan members of Congress conferred upon them a Commendation and Citation in recognition of their service to the United States military (see Attachment 1). By letters dated March 20, 1997 to Congressman Bill Archer, Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, and to Congressman Clay Shaw, Chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources, bipartisan members of the House also expressed their support for continuing welfare benefits to Hmong and Lao veterans (see Attachment 2).

Given the overwhelming evidence of Congressional intent and the directive to agencies under Section 5566, we believe the Department's decision to discontinue food stamp benefits to Hmong and Lao veterans is clearly mistaken. In light of the urgent and desperate situation that the most vulnerable in this community are facing with loss of their food stamps, we, together with other concerned organizations, would request a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss this matter in further detail.

Sincerely,



Karen K. Narasaki
Executive Director

cc: Sylvia Matthews, White House Deputy Chief of Staff
Doris Matsui, White House Deputy Director for Public Liaison
Jonathan Abrams, Esq., Hogan & Hartson
Carric Lewis, Food Resource and Action Center
Brian Thao, Hmong National Development, Inc.
Khoa Xuan Le, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Josh Bernstein/Dinah Wiley, National Immigration Law Center
Phil Smith, Lao Veterans of America
Kay Bengston, Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs
Michael Hill/Cynthia Phillips, United States Catholic Conference

*"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger."
—President John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961.*

Commendation and Citation for Vietnam War Service in Laos

On this 12th day of May, 1996

Bill McCollum
Congressman Bill McCollum

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 1997

**The Honorable Bill Archer
Chairman
Ways and Means Committee
1102 Longworth HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515**

Dear Mr. Chairman:

It is our understanding that your committee has been considering a possible exemption for the Hmong veterans to be included in H.R. 1060, the technical corrections amendments to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. We are concerned that H.R. 1060, as introduced, does not include an exemption for the Hmong veterans and their dependents, and are writing to express our strongest support for your continued pursuit of a solution to this critical issue.

We agree that reform of the welfare system was necessary as a means to facilitate the transition from welfare to work and to encourage greater self-sufficiency for able-bodied adults. However, the legislation enacted last year will adversely affect the Hmong people of Laos who deserve special consideration because they cooperated and sacrificed for our government and its Armed Forces during the Vietnam War.

Because of a provision in the welfare reform law, legal residents, with a few exceptions, are ineligible to receive SSI. As a result, many of the elderly and disabled Hmong veterans and their dependents will be discontinued from the SSI program by August 31, 1997.

During the Vietnam War, many of the Hmong people worked for our intelligence and special forces groups. It is wrong to abandon these men and women who served as valuable allies to us during the Southeast Asian conflict.

Though not considered veterans by our government, the Hmong of Laos were engaged in covert operations directed by the Central Intelligence Agency. Since many served in non-uniformed units, it remains uncertain if "veteran" status can be proved. These special forces teams aided our efforts tremendously during the Southeast Asian conflict, but, at great cost and personal loss to themselves. Many of the Hmong lost their lives. They suffered innumerable casualties, and lost their homeland to Communist forces. After the war, the Hmong were forced to live in refugee camps, many in substandard conditions, and were later brought to our country as political refugees.

The process of assimilation to the United States has been especially difficult for the Hmong. One major setback for many,

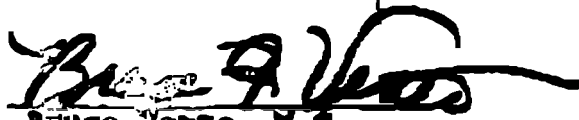
is that their command of the English language is insufficient to successfully complete the naturalization process. This is partly because, up until the 1950s, the Hmong did not have a written language, which has made learning to speak, read, and write the English language extremely difficult. Further, the English-learning process has been stymied by the high rate of illiteracy among the Hmong in their own native language. Educational opportunities in their homeland, for the majority of the Hmong who were brought to the United States as political refugees, were seriously undermined as a result of the war-ravaged years in Laos.

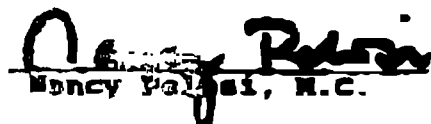
Aside from limited educational and work opportunities in the United States, the Hmong must overcome many other obstacles during their assimilation and adjustment process. First, many Hmong who survived the war are afflicted with physically-disabling conditions and mental disabilities such as post-traumatic stress syndrome. Second, they must adjust to a set of very different cultural practices and norms. Finally, the Hmong are subject to discrimination and prejudice in their new environment.

In closing, we commend your efforts to find a solution to exempt the Hmong and thank you in advance for your every consideration of this very urgent situation.

Sincerely,


Calvin Dooley, M.C.


Bruce Vento, M.C.

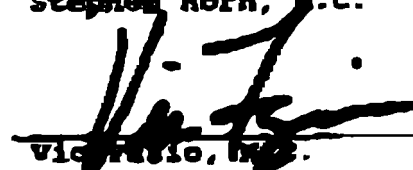

Nancy Pelosi, M.C.


Martin Olav Sabo, M.C.

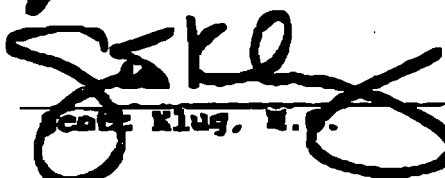

Randy "Duke" Cunningham, M.C.


Gerald Solomon, M.C.


Stephen Horn, M.C.


Vic Fazio, M.C.


James Oberstar, M.C.


Scott Klug, M.C.

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Aside from limited educational and work opportunities in the United States, the Hmong must overcome many other obstacles during their assimilation and adjustment process. First, many Hmong who survived the war are afflicted with physically-disabling conditions and mental disabilities such as post-traumatic stress syndrome. Second, they must adjust to a set of very different cultural practices and norms. Finally, the Hmong are subject to discrimination and prejudice in their new environment.

In closing, we commend your efforts to find a solution to exempt the Hmong and thank you in advance for your every consideration of this very urgent situation.

Sincerely,


Edwin Dooley, M.C.


Bruno Vonco, M.C.


Nancy Paloni, M.C.


Martin Olav Sabo, M.C.

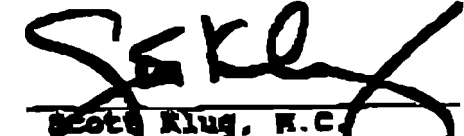

Jack Cunningham, M.C.

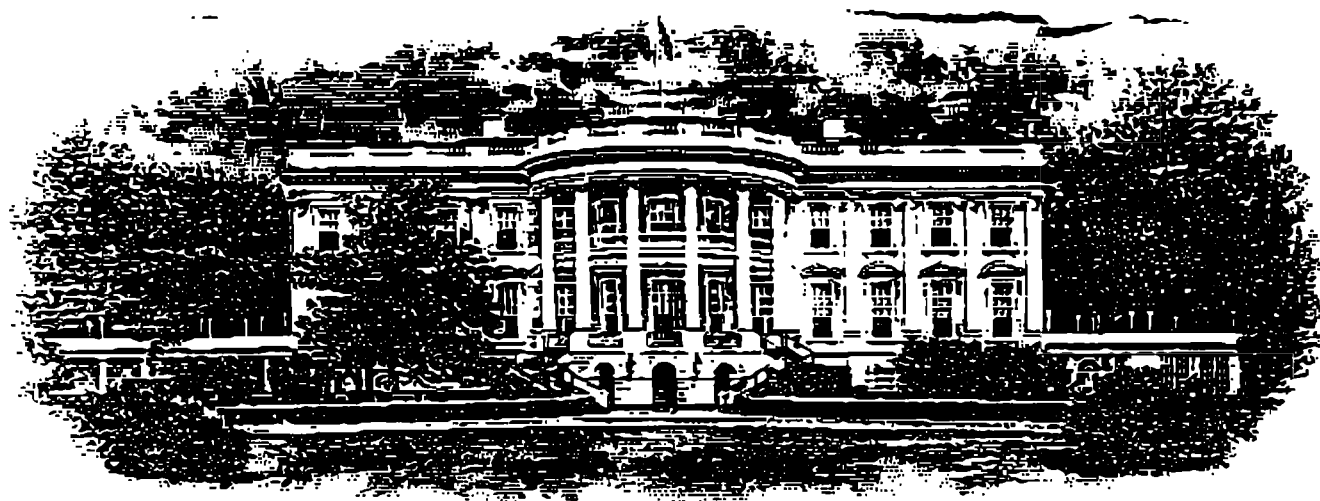

George Johnson, M.C.


Stephen Horn, M.C.


Vic Fazio, M.C.


James Oberstar, M.C.


Scott Klug, M.C.

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F. Hmong

Explantation of Amendment

Offered by Congressmen Shaw, Kleczka, and Ramstad

The amendment expresses the sense of Congress that, based on their service on behalf of the United States during the Vietnam War, Hmong veterans should be treated like other noncitizen veterans under the welfare reform law.

AMENDMENT TO H.R. 1048
OFFERED BY M.

At the end of subtitle A of title IV insert the following new section:

1 **SEC. 407. CONGRESSIONAL STATEMENT REGARDING BENE-**
2 **FITS FOR HMONG AND OTHER HIGHLAND**
3 **LAO VETERANS.**

4 (a) **FINDINGS.**—The Congress makes the following
5 findings:

6 (1) Hmong and other Highland Lao tribal peo-
7 pies were recruited, armed, trained, and funded for
8 military operations by the United States Department
9 of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, Department
10 of State, and Agency for International Development
11 to further United States national security interests
12 during the Vietnam conflict.

13 (2) Hmong and other Highland Lao tribal
14 forces sacrificed their own lives and saved the lives
15 of American military personnel by rescuing downed
16 American pilots and aircrews and by engaging and
17 successfully fighting North Vietnamese troops.

18 (3) Thousands of Hmong and other Highland
19 Lao veterans who fought in special guerilla units on
20 behalf of the United States during the Vietnam con-

1 flict, along with their families, have been lawfully ad-
2 mitted to the United States in recent years.

3 (4) The Personal Responsibility and Work Op-
4 portunity Reconciliation Act (Public Law 104-193),
5 the new national welfare reform law, restricts cer-
6 tain welfare benefits for noncitizens of the United
7 States and the exceptions for noncitizen veterans of
8 the Armed Forces of the United States do not ex-
9 tend to Hmong veterans of the Vietnam conflict era,
10 making Hmong veterans and their families receiving
11 certain welfare benefits subject to restrictions de-
12 spite their military service on behalf of the United
13 States.

14 (b) CONGRESSIONAL STATEMENT.—It is the sense of
15 the Congress that Hmong and other Highland Lao veter-
16 ans who fought on behalf of the Armed Forces of the Unit-
17 ed States during the Vietnam conflict and have lawfully
18 been admitted to the United States for permanent resi-
19 dence should be considered veterans for purposes of con-
20 tinuing certain welfare benefits consistent with the excep-
21 tions provided other noncitizen veterans under the Per-
22 sonal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation
23 Act of 1996.