

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Welcome.US Mobilizes Support for Afghan Refugees in the United States**

*Former presidents, first ladies, Afghan-Americans, military leaders and veterans, resettlement organizations, nonprofits, business and philanthropic leaders, governors and mayors join all-hands effort*

*Group launches national campaign showcasing need for all Americans to welcome Afghan refugees*

**Washington, D.C.**—Today, a new national initiative called [Welcome.US](#) is launching to engage and mobilize all Americans to welcome and support refugees, beginning with the individuals and families who fled Afghanistan. Welcome.US provides a single point of entry to channel the outpouring support of Americans who want to get involved by donating supplies, money, or time to frontline organizations; offering temporary housing; or sponsoring Afghan families as they start new lives in the United States.

In addition to encouraging Americans to donate to front-line organizations, Welcome.US created the [Welcome Fund](#), which will provide emergency grants to nonprofit organizations working to address the most urgent needs facing Afghan refugees as they arrive and begin new lives in the United States. An independent advisory committee will oversee the Welcome Fund.

Welcome.US is launching a national campaign, which includes a [TV ad](#), to highlight the need for all Americans to join the thousands of people who have already stepped up to welcome our new Afghan neighbors as they get settled and build their new lives.

Every American is invited to join this nationwide, bipartisan effort—learn more and sign up to be a welcomer at [Welcome.US](#).

Welcome.US is co-chaired by Cecilia Muñoz, senior adviser to New America and former director of the White House Domestic Policy Council under President Obama, and John Bridgeland, CEO of the COVID Collaborative and former director of the White House Domestic Policy Council under President Bush.

Welcome.US is a comprehensive partnership that transcends politics and brings together Afghan-Americans, refugees, community sponsorship groups, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, philanthropy, veterans, corporations, universities, governors, mayors, and many

others. President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama, President George. W. Bush and Laura Bush, and President William J. Clinton and Secretary Hillary Clinton serve as honorary co-chairs.

“At the heart of so many faiths is the idea that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us,” **said President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama.** “Many of the refugees fleeing Afghanistan stood by America and risked everything for a chance at a better life. Many women and girls in particular were at risk of losing their basic human rights, and are just looking for a chance to live, work, and raise their families free from fear. Through Welcome.US, we can welcome and support our new Afghan neighbors, and reaffirm our common humanity.”

“Thousands of Afghans stood with us on the front lines to push for a safer world, and now they need our help,” **said President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush.** “We are proud to support Welcome.US and the work to help Afghan families get settled and build new lives. We stand ready to show our new Afghan neighbors and the rest of the world how a welcoming and generous spirit forms the backbone of what makes our country so great.”

“This is the right way for all of us to fulfill our responsibility to our Afghan partners and give these new neighbors the support they need,” **said President Bill Clinton and Secretary Hillary Clinton.** “No country should ever take lightly the moral obligation to protect its allies who unite for freedom. Welcome.US shows us and the world what’s best about America—and why we are so hopeful about its future.”

## **A BROAD-BASED, BIPARTISAN INITIATIVE**

Welcome.US is also supported by the fast-growing National Welcome Council, consisting of leaders across diverse sectors of our society, and the Welcome States, consisting of mayors and governors from both parties. The National Welcome Council and Welcome States demonstrate that Americans of all stripes across the country are working in common purpose to help our Afghan neighbors begin new lives in safety and freedom.

The group’s **National Welcome Council** includes more than 100 leaders, including General Stanley A. McChrystal, former Commander of United States Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A), Afghan-American activist Bilal Askaryar, author Khalid Hosseini, Yo-Yo Ma, Cardinal Joseph Tobin, Archbishop of Newark, and Nazanin Ash, Vice President of Global Policy and Advocacy at the International Rescue Committee. The Welcome States include mayors and governors from both parties from across the country, including Colorado Governor Jared Polis (D), Maryland Governor Larry Hogan (R). A full list of National Welcome Council members can be found [here](#).

“People in Afghanistan haven’t seen a day of peace since the Soviet invasion 1979,” **said Bilal Askaryar.** “Over the past 20 years, Afghans of every ethnicity, religion, and gender fought for the cause of hope and freedom. Now their best chance at peace is in the United States. With a fresh start and an incredible amount of support from Welcome.US, they can begin to rebuild their lives in peace.”

“This is an incredible story about so many Americans coming together to help,” **said Afghan-American author and pediatrician Nadia Hashimi.** “I can’t go back in time and ease my parents’ early days in the United States, but I can, with the spirit and mission of Welcome.US, ensure a softer landing for new neighbors.”

“The people of Afghanistan always treated me with hospitality and friendship,” said **General Stanley A. McChrystal**. “They met every challenge with courage and strength and helped keep us safe for two decades after 9/11. I am honored to be part of Welcome.US—this whole-country response to welcome them to their new nation, full of possibility for a new life.”

“Everyone deserves the opportunity to call a place home,” said **Governor Polis**. “Afghan refugees have supported U.S. operations in Afghanistan, providing invaluable aid to American troops. The collective efforts of grateful patriotic Americans lending a hand to support Afghan refugees coming to the U.S. will make a tremendous difference in each and every refugees' life. Whether you pitch in a few dollars or open your home, together we can build a better, brighter future for every Afghan refugee.”

“Helping our Afghan allies build new lives is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue—it’s just common sense,” said **Governor Larry Hogan**. “Alongside so many partners who are equally dedicated to this effort, we are directing all available resources to help because it’s the right thing for all of us to do.”

## **A UNIFIED, NATIONAL EFFORT**

Welcome.US is working in partnership with state, local, and federal officials, partner organizations, and the nine national agencies contracted by the government to oversee refugee resettlement to create a single platform to fulfill the needs of those on the front line.

This first-of-its kind organization will also facilitate additional strategic collaborations on an ongoing basis in response to emerging challenges facing our new neighbors, and amplify the stories of Afghans to educate the American people about their journey.

“I was a baby when my family fled a civil war and thank God we were welcomed in America with open arms,” said **Krish O'Mara Vignarajah, President and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and member of the National Welcome Council**. “We are writing the history book our grandchildren will read in terms of what kind of welcome these families and children receive. The success of this resettlement effort is a humanitarian, economic, and national security imperative.”

“The history of refugee resettlement in the United States is an American success story,” said **Nazanin Ash, Vice President of Global Policy and Advocacy at the International Rescue Committee**. “The strength, resilience, and contributions of refugees have enriched American communities for generations. Now, with the incredible support and welcome for Afghan refugees from Americans across the country, you have a movement that can change lives.”

## **THE POWER OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Volunteer associations, local nonprofits, faith institutions, companies, mayors, and everyday Americans from every corner of the country are already stepping up to welcome our new Afghan neighbors. Welcome.US is building on these efforts and enlisting all Americans to support those seeking safety in the United States, starting with Afghan families.

The private sector is also offering critical support, including Airbnb which is providing funding and resources to Airbnb.org to help give temporary stays for 20,000 Afghan refugees.

Today, **Instacart** is announcing a partnership with the International Rescue Committee to donate 25,000 culturally appropriate grocery meals to our new Afghan neighbors, **Walmart** is announcing a \$500,000 grant to benefit Welcome.US and the Welcome Fund, **Starbucks** is announcing \$350,000 in grants from The Starbucks Foundation to nonprofit organizations supporting Afghan Special Immigrant Visa applicants and refugee resettlement, **Microsoft** has committed an initial \$1 million in cash, technology, and services to support the evacuation and resettlement of refugees, and **Facebook** is announcing \$150,000 in ad credits to help Welcome.US support new Afghan refugees in the United States.

“As a nation, we’re defined by our fundamental decency and humanitarian spirit,” said **Brad Smith, Microsoft President**. “Today, Microsoft is joining the Welcoming Committee of Welcome.US to help coordinate support for Afghan refugees across the country.”

“It is in our company DNA to step up in those moments of greatest need,” said **Dan Bartlett, Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs at Walmart**. “We are proud to join Welcome.US in its mission to build a broad coalition of organizations, companies, and Americans working to help bring the promise and possibilities of our country to our new Afghan neighbors.”

“It’s impossible to imagine how it must feel to leave everything you know behind and start a new life for you and your family on the other side of the world,” said **Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook Chief Operating Officer**. “We need to welcome these brave people with open arms and open hearts. That’s why I’m so proud Facebook is part of the Welcome.US initiative, helping it to spread the word and support these families when they need it the most.”

“This is a historic humanitarian crisis, and it will require all of us to step up to help,” said **Instacart CEO Fidji Simo**. “At Instacart, we believe that food is care, comfort, and nourishment, especially during times of crisis. We are proud to work with the International Rescue Committee and Welcome.US to help provide culturally appropriate food to Afghan refugees as they begin their new lives in communities across America.”

“The displacement and resettlement of Afghan refugees in the United States and around the world is a significant humanitarian crisis and everyone has a role to play in responding, including the global business community,” said **Joe Gebbia, Airbnb Co-founder and Chairman of Airbnb.org**. “Airbnb.org and Airbnb invite business leaders to join our efforts to provide immediate support to Afghan refugees.”

“America is at a critical moment in our history—it is our duty to recognize our common humanity and welcome refugees from Afghanistan with open arms,” said **Hamdi Ulukaya, CEO and Founder of Chobani and Founder of the Tent Partnership for Refugees**. “They have stood by our side, and now it’s our turn to stand by theirs. While it’s very important we all work together to provide for their immediate needs, we also need to make sure we help integrate them into America and give them the long-term stability that only comes through having decent jobs. Tent is very proud to be leading efforts to mobilize the business community to hire our new neighbors, and include them in our communities.”

In the coming days, Welcome.US plans to announce a new initiative with major corporate commitments.

## **STANDING WITH OUR AFGHAN PARTNERS**

“America has long been a beacon of hope and refuge for those in search of safety. This effort to welcome Afghans who have already contributed so much will enrich us all by their very presence and show the world America at our very best,” **said Welcome.US Co-Chairs Cecilia Muñoz and John Bridgeland.**

“Now is the time for all of us to come together to welcome Afghans seeking safety, embrace them as our neighbors, and discover in our outreach to them a new sense of purpose for ourselves and nation,” **said Muñoz and Bridgeland.**

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