

# IOWA SHARES & the Cambodian Refugees

by Matthew Walsh

**"To keep you is no benefit. To destroy you is no loss."**

—*Khmer Rouge motto*

**"In a world where there is hate, there is more reason to love.  
In a world where there is hunger, there is more reason to share."**

—*Governor Robert Ray to Iowans,  
Christmas Eve 1979*

**T**hese two quotations seem so different, yet they are intricately linked. Those who espoused the Khmer Rouge motto created a world of misery and depredation for millions of Cambodians under the oppressive Communist regime between 1975 and 1979. Half a world away, Governor Robert Ray encouraged and inspired ordinary Iowa men, women, and children to alleviate that misery by making tangible gifts through the statewide program called Iowa SHARES (an acronym for Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation).

Far from being a simple story of Iowans aiding Cambodians, Iowa SHARES came to mean many different things to many different people.

During Robert Ray's two terms as governor of Iowa (1969–1983), he confronted three crises regarding Vietnam War refugees. The first followed the fall of Saigon to Communism in 1975. As the United States began resettling refugees, one ethnic group, the Tai Dam, petitioned 30 U.S. governors as well as French and Canadian leaders in the hopes of re-

settling their entire group together. Traditionally, American policymakers deliberately sought to break up large groups of refugees in the resettlement process. They feared that large clusters of refugee populations might socioeconomically disrupt and burden local communities or states, concerns then being reinforced by Florida's experience with Cuban refugees during the Castro era.

But Ray considered it vital to keep the Tai Dam community together, in order to save its traditional way of life. Ray traveled to Washington, D.C., to seek a presidential exemption allowing Iowa to accept the entire Tai Dam ethnic group. Subsequently, through his leadership, the Governor's Task Force for Indochinese Refugees began resettling over 1,200 Tai Dam in Iowa in 1975.

Shortly after resettlement, the Tai Dam held a celebration. Ray invited President Gerald Ford to attend. In his place Ford sent Kenneth Quinn, a U.S. Foreign Service diplomat who had been raised in Dubuque. Quinn had worked in Vietnam from 1968 until 1974



COURTESY OF ROBERT D. RAY

A Cambodian boy sells bananas, as photographed by Governor Robert Ray on his visit to Southeast Asia in the late 1970s.

and also served under Henry Kissinger and Richard Holbrook on the National Security Council and in the State Department. Appreciating Quinn's expertise on refugee issues, Ray began recruiting him, and in September 1978, Quinn starting working with Iowa officials while on loan from the State Department.

The second refugee crisis occurred in January 1979. After attending a Drake University basketball game, Ray returned home and saw a *60 Minutes* television news program on the "boat people." Journalist Ed Bradley's report showed desperate and traumatized Vietnamese refugees streaming toward the Malaysian coast in small boats and collapsing from exhaustion. Some were carried inland, but others faced piracy, rape, starvation, drowning, and murder.

Moved by the tragedy, Ray appealed to his counterparts at the National Governors' Association meeting in February to help him petition the federal government to take in the boat people.

As the crisis peaked in July 1979, Ray and Quinn traveled to Geneva for a United Nations Conference on Indochinese Refugees. To a standing ovation, Vice President Walter Mondale announced that the U.S. had pledged to take in 168,000 boat people and to send the U.S. Navy to rescue the thousands of refugees being preyed upon in Southeast Asia. By 1981, nearly 8,000 refugees (including the Tai Dam) had resettled in Iowa.

The change in state demographics was striking. In 1970, the percentage of Asian-born Iowans had



This Hmong story cloth was created by refugee Shoua Her, who came to Oskaloosa in 1976 with 20 other Hmong families. The hand-embroidered story cloth depicts the everyday life of Hmong people in Laos before and during the Vietnam War; their flight to Thailand and refugee camps; and finally the arrival of planes to take them to the United States. This spectacular example of the art of *paj ntaub* conveys Hmong traditions and stories to the next generation.

stood at about 7 percent—by 1990, it was over 42 percent (note that these numbers were not broken down by country). According to the 2000 census, over 7,000 Vietnamese, 4,000 Laotians, and 600 Cambodians populated the state.

The third refugee crisis arose from a decade of civil war and repression that had ravaged Cambodia, first under the dictatorship of Pol Pot and then under the Khmer Rouge. Between 1975 and 1979, 20 percent of Cambodia's population died in an orgy of violence. One former Khmer Rouge soldier later recalled that he had slit so many victims' throats that he developed arthritis in his wrist and forearm from the repetitive motion.

The violence seared Cambodian survivors who later arrived in Iowa. As teenagers at Hoover High School in Des Moines, Monyra Chau and Pa Mao wrote essays recalling the horrors. Chau, whose father was killed by the Communists, remembered: "It was strange. They were wearing black cloths and black caps. They carried guns all over the places. Some of them went into people's houses and took their properties. . . . They told the people to leave their homes and town. Everybody had to go to different places. The people had to work

on the farms, nobody worked in the city. People had to work hard and do whatever they said. If somebody did not follow them, they killed him. We didn't have much food to eat either. . . . They let people eat like animals. We had to get up to work at four o'clock in the morning. When people told them that they were sick, they wouldn't believe the people. They had to take the people to go to work."

Pa Mao, who had also lost her father to Communist violence, recalled the starvation that drove her family to escape to Thailand. "We got up very early before sunrise and walked 40 km. a day. We took pottery, rice, food, and only the clothes that we wore. We walked three days and nights that seemed like one very long day because we didn't sleep. We were too afraid of the soldiers, so we didn't walk on the road, we walked through the jungle."

Hundreds of thousands of war-ravaged and starving Cambodians made the same decision to flee to Thailand. As Robert Ray saw firsthand, however, arrival in Thailand did not ease their misery.

In October 1979, Ray and five other American governors toured Communist China as part of the normalization of relations between China and the United

States. He suggested that the small delegation take a side tour of Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand. Ray's reputation for resettling refugees preceded him; at a refugee camp, he saw an Iowa Department of Transportation map with refugee populations highlighted across the state. Ray, his wife, Billie, his aide Kenneth Quinn, and the other governors were shocked and haunted by the camp's horrible conditions. On his flight back to Iowa, Ray began to compose a speech to deliver a few days later at the General Assembly of the Christian Church in St. Louis. He described how they had seen over 30,000 people packed together.

"Have you ever stood in a small muddy spot about two hours while five people died around you? I did, two days ago, at the Cambodian border camp of Sa Kaeo," Ray said. "Those deaths were only part of the more than 50 that died in that one camp, on that one day. To see little kids with sunken eyes and protruding tummies trying to eke out a smile will bring a tear to the eyes of even the most calloused."

In the speech, Ray referred to Pope John Paul II's visit that month to Living History Farms near Des Moines, and he emphasized the message that Judeo-Christians had an obligation to work to alleviate world suffering and to relieve victims of crimes against human rights.

"Christianity and Christian love know no boundaries. They don't stop at state lines or national borders," he said. "They are universal."

Ray had been struck by China's tremendous poverty and recent struggles to modernize agriculture. Life in China, however, "was like a walk through the park compared with our last stop" at the refugee camps in Thailand, he said. He compared the suffering of the refugees of Indochina with the plight of the Jews during Nazi Germany. Ray declared that the world had missed an opportunity to help the Jews—the world had failed that test but now faced a new crisis of mass distress.

"I believe that we can never live with a clear conscience if we turn our backs on dying human beings who cry out for a touch of life," he said. "There is no way I can describe the misery and human suffering and anguish of these people—God's children. It's indescribable. But try if you will to imagine what it would be like to run, hide and scramble through wet and rough terrain for weeks, day after day, in an attempt to escape Communist torture and death. Add to that the fact that you were leaving your home, your belongings, your family, or that your spouse, or children or parents had already been killed. And, that if you reached a border you would have no assurance you wouldn't be thrown right back into the path of the pursuers."

Ray told his listeners that as the people of a prosperous nation, Americans needed to take action. He added that even critics who opposed resettling refugees in the U.S. still should aim to relieve their immediate suffering: "We're talking not where these people are going to live—but whether they are going to live."

Ray played on Missouri's nickname in his appeal: "As we meet here tonight in Missouri, the 'show-me state,' I sincerely believe that Jesus is saying to our church: Don't tell me of your concerns for human rights, Show Me! Don't tell me of your concerns for the poor, the disenfranchised, the underprivileged, the unemployed, Show Me! Don't tell me of your concerns for the rejected, the prisoner, the hungry, the thirsty, the homeless, Show Me! Don't tell me of your concerns for these people when you have a chance to save their lives—Show Me! Don't tell me how Christian you are, Show Me! Show Me!"

**R**ay's concern for refugees resonated with other Iowans as the international crisis attracted growing publicity. After the Iowa delegation returned from the camps, the governor handed his undeveloped photos from the trip to reporter David Yepsen of the *Des Moines Register*, which devoted a number of articles and editorials to documenting the crisis.

In November, after reading the article "Let's Bomb Cambodia. This Time with Food," fourth graders at Brooklyn-Guernsey-Malcolm elementary schools wrote to Ray. The youngsters enthusiastically volunteered ideas. Several suggested using airplanes, boats, or trains to deliver food to the desperate. Donita Nicklas recommended putting cartons of milk and juice onto an airplane, and added, "Why don't we take a boat with fruit and go down there with tractors and medicine." David Hawkins stated, "If I was governor I would make a bridge to Cambodia and take a lot of food for them." Lynn Huddleson asked, "Why don't you try getting food by submarine?" She insisted, "I'd like you to do something about the people starving in Cambodia. I hate looking at the half-starved person with no clothes on. I hope you do something about it." Dale Henry Goodrich declared, "I wouldn't eat for a week if I could get the food I was suppose to eat to them."

In writing to their governor, students engaged in active citizenship, perhaps for the first time. While teachers helped students reflect upon and sort out powerful issues like starvation and politics, they deep-

ened Iowa's relationship with the Cambodian refugees. Student Ada Marie Weiermann asked, "Are the Cambodians going to live? I hope so. Because it isn't right for the Vietnams to try to kill them when they didn't do nothing to the Vietnams." Students generally blamed Communist Vietnam for the plight of the Cambodians, overlooking the genocidal role of Pol Pot and the Cambodian Communists. But while these fourth-graders missed much of the complexities of recent Asian turmoil, several specifically suggested that America itself bore some culpability for the misery, since U.S. forces had devastated Cambodia during the Vietnam War. Donita Nicklas asked, "Why did we attack them? My teacher said we bombed them once." "Iowa has spare money," Danny Allen wrote. "We should give it to Cambodia [because] it was half our fault."

**I**n his St. Louis speech at the end of October, Ray had not yet proposed a specific mechanism to channel midwestern aid to refugees, but in a November press release, he announced the formation of Iowa SHARES—Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation. Again citing the teachings of Pope John Paul II on his recent visit, Ray declared that Iowans had a special role as "stewards of the earth with an obligation to share the fruit of our land with all mankind."

The relief project tapped into Iowa's sense of pride and duty as a leading agricultural state. "We will be measuring contributions . . . in terms of how many bushels of Iowa grain could be bought with the money donated. A bushel of corn right now sells for about \$2.20 and that is the figure we will use throughout the campaign. Each bushel of grain purchased will be considered as having bought a SHARE in humanity." Ray aimed to raise a sum equal to the value of 52,500 bushels, representing one barge full of Iowa grain. This, he said, "would be a mighty symbol of Iowa generosity and an important example for the rest of the world."

Although Iowa SHARES accepted large donations from corporate donors such as Pioneer Hi-Bred International of Des Moines, Ray and Quinn primarily envisioned Iowa SHARES as a grass-roots project enlisting

"agriculture, business, labor unions, civic and social organizations, schools, fraternal organizations, and individual citizens." Ray declared, "Many times in the past we have proved that ours is not just a state in the heart of the nation, but also a state with a heart."

Iowa SHARES was set up as a tax-exempt non-profit corporation coordinated by the Governor's Office. The program's bipartisan and ecumenical board of directors included Ray, Quinn, and other prominent Iowans. Religious figures rallied to promote Iowa SHARES; early leaders included Rabbi Jay Goldberg and Reverend Fred Strickland. Media personality Mary Jane Odell at Iowa Public Television (IPTV) and *Des Moines Register and Tribune* editor and president Michael Gartner were also closely involved, helping launch Iowa SHARES with a well-orchestrated publicity campaign in radio, television, and newspapers. Odell described how she would talk about the program to people in elevators and to anyone who would listen. She told her fellow members of the board of directors, "If you need me, I am on somebody's telephone."

Early fundraising strategically connected Iowa SHARES to the spirit of charity during the holiday season. The Governor's Office declared the week right before Christmas to be an official "Iowa SHARES week." Echoing the emotional impact of refugee misery that had commanded Ray's attention, the *Des Moines Register* published articles dramatically detailing the plight of Cambodians. Next to compelling images of starving children, the newspaper printed a coupon that readers could mail in with an Iowa SHARES donation. Other

Iowa newspapers also promoted the program. To gain more publicity, Quinn sent dozens of letters to other major U.S. newspapers.

Ray joined Odell to record four public-service announcements. In the middle of an emotional plea for funds, Odell crumpled up her script and fought back tears: "I just want to talk to you for a minute about the starvation and disease of the Cambodian refugees. Lot of hunger and starvation around the world and at home too. But the situation of the Cambodians is so desperate, so immediate."

On November 21, Odell hosted a special IPTV pro-

SHSI: STATE ARCHIVES, RAY PAPERS

## Iowa SHARES




Already as many as two million Cambodians may have perished and countless others now face death from a possible famine.

On November 21, Governor Robert Ray announced an urgent appeal to all Iowans to respond to this tragic situation called Iowa SHARES (Iowa Sends Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation).

### YOU CAN HELP

Contributions to this drive will be measured in terms of the number of bushels of Iowa grain they could produce. And, while Iowa grain will not actually be shipped to Southeast Asia, the equivalent amounts of money raised will be used to buy food and medical supplies.

As Governor Ray said, "Iowans have proved many times that ours is not just a state in the heart of the nation, but also a state with a heart. Together, by sharing what we have, we, the people of Iowa, can have a direct effect in the saving of human lives. Surely there is no greater work on the face of this earth."

Please Give Generously

### Iowa SHARES

YES, I'D LIKE TO SHARE —  
And, because I want to Send Help to Aid Refugees and End Starvation, I am giving \$\_\_\_\_\_ (Every \$2.20 contributed will buy the equivalent of a bushel of Iowa grain.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Send your check or money order to:  
IOWA SHARES,  
P.O. BOX 1979  
Des Moines IA 50306.

Thank you for your contribution.



gram titled *Cambodia: What Iowans Need to Know*. On this show, Ray, his wife, Billie, and Kenneth Quinn spoke about witnessing refugees die of starvation. Viewers saw emotionally moving photographs that Ray had taken, documenting the camp conditions. IPTV followed up with documentaries such as *Cambodia: A Nation is Dying* and *Don't Forget the Khmer*.

The campaign quickly drew responses from Iowa's young people, who often came up with ingenious methods for raising money. Angie King's third-grade class at King Elementary in Des Moines took out a loan from First Federal Bank to buy and sell popcorn balls. Youngsters Dan VandeLune, Rob Tompkins, Ryan Tompkins, and Travis Spurgeon of West Des Moines went door to door for donations. A sixth-grade class at Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Cedar Falls raised money through a candy sale, and Beaverdale's Holy Trinity School sponsored a Mardi Gras parade and food sale. Students in the Aquin School system held an 11-mile walkathon from Garryowen to Cascade. In February, instead of exchanging Valentines, fifth and sixth graders at Washington Elementary in Mason City gave money to Iowa SHARES. The ten-person youth group team at Altoona Christian Church fasted for 22 hours to raise funds. Nine-year-old Eric Sharp got an advance on his Christmas money and then wrote to Ray: "Please take my Christmas money of \$50 and send it to the Cambodians. I think they deserve a Christmas too."

College-age Iowans also mobilized, following Quinn's call for cash-strapped students to have "one less beer, one less movie, or one less meal" and donate the savings to Iowa SHARES. At the University of Northern Iowa, Kappa Delta Pi Honorary Society for Education raised money. Cornell College students bought special cafeteria meals that included a one-dollar contribution to Iowa SHARES. At the student and faculty Christmas dinner, "symbolic empty [collection] bowls" sat at the dinner tables. David Kalianov, an engineering student at Iowa State University, composed and recorded a song titled "Child of Cambodia." It became the theme song, and he donated the copyright.

Community organizations and companies also pitched in. One group advertised the opportunity for families to take photographs of their children with Santa Claus for a dollar each, donating all the proceeds. The Des Moines Judo Club held a special tournament at the YMCA, sending the admissions fees to Iowa SHARES. Employees at Weitz Brothers Construction Company forfeited their usual Christmas bonuses of hams or fruit baskets in order to help. Individual Iowans also responded. After seeing a public televi-

sion special on Cambodia, Therese Koch of Boone felt guilty for having bought an electric frying pan. She returned it and donated the funds to Iowa SHARES. A Des Moines family felt compelled to donate despite their own struggles with old age, cancer, and heart failure. They acknowledged, "We are not too flush but feel we must help this much."

The overall success of Iowa SHARES stunned even the most optimistic board members. In its first week, the program raised over \$25,000, and by December 14, over \$205,000. Between the opening of the campaign on November 23, 1979, through its conclusion on April 30, 1981, Iowa SHARES brought in \$554,789 (nearly \$1.4 million in today's dollars), more than four times the governor's initial goal.

Board members voted to send the aid to the Cambodians through private relief agencies such as Catholic Relief Services, UNICEF, American Refugee Services, and the World Food Program. Iowa medical professionals like registered nurse Debra Tate and physician Harlo Hove volunteered their services and worked in refugee camps in Thailand, supported by Iowa SHARES funds.

**I**ndividual Iowans chose to donate to Iowa SHARES for a variety of reasons—emotional, personal, and political. Many felt compelled to donate after being bombarded with powerful images from the media. Their letters to the Governor's Office constantly referred to the public television shows about Cambodia, and one couple requested a copy of the IPTV interview with Ray, to share with others who wanted to raise money. Edna Spencer of Chariton wrote, "The pictures and reports are heartbreaking." Kathie Horney acknowledged that when she saw newspaper photos of refugees, she felt guilty for having had a huge meal. Referring to her own infant and seven-year-old, she wrote, "I cannot imagine what they would look like if they were starving."

Some Iowans gave in honor of others. When First Lady Rosalyn Carter visited Clinton, Catholic grade school students donated to Iowa SHARES in her name. For the grandchildren of the deceased Herman VanOort, a donation to Iowa SHARES meant a way to honor their grandfather, and Quinn's thank-you note to their widowed grandmother brought her cheer. While some donors preferred to remain anonymous, Iowa's newspapers recognized others by printing long lists of names.

Many Iowans supported Iowa SHARES because they had participated in the earlier resettlement of Indochi-

nese refugees. Through her church, Norma Weaver of Newburg had helped sponsor a Cambodian family, assisting them in adjusting to Iowa life and driving them to doctor's appointments. Recognizing how much the starving Cambodians on television specials looked like the family she had come to adore, she made a donation.

William Rosenfeld, a Mason City doctor, volunteered to serve on Iowa medical teams sent by Iowa SHARES to aid Cambodian refugees in Thailand, citing his earlier experience working at the Khao-I-Dang refugee camp in that very country. As a medical student and doctor, Rosenfeld had read in textbooks about exotic diseases, but to encounter them in real life shocked him. "In four days, I saw more acute medicine than I will ever see again," he wrote. "People had malaria, dysentery with dehydration to the point of shock and coma, large tropical ulcers crawling with maggots, meningococcal meningitis, polio, measles, severe pneumonia, and draining abscesses from Potts disease of the spine. Most of them had worms or other intestinal parasites." Rosenfeld had treated 60 to 70 patients daily at a camp sheltering over 130,000 refugees. He recalled a young boy who stayed with an older woman through her death. "He didn't cry; he didn't do anything. He just sat there. He had no one else."

He described how some children in the camp "would enact atrocities done under Pol Pot's regime. A child would act like an old woman being led with a rope to a pit. Another child would hit her over the head with a stick, and she'd fall into the pit. That's the way [the Pol Pot] executed people. . . . The children would tie another child to a tree and pretend they were cutting out the captive's gall bladder and drinking the bile from it, another thing they recalled that the troops did."

Religious beliefs motivated many Iowans. For some Jews, Iowa SHARES represented a means to fulfill the post-Holocaust pledge of "never again." Synagogues joined in fundraising, and five Iowa rabbis wrote an open letter to the Jewish community, citing the Torah's dictum "Do not stand by idly while your fellow human being's blood is spilled." Their message continued: "The reality of Cambodia, in all its tragedy, assaults us daily. As Jews who are survivors of the Holocaust, be it [in] fact or in memory, we recall the silence and the indifference of the world during those days. We vowed that it would never happen again. Today, it is time for us to redeem that vow."

Across Iowa, religious leaders wrote sermons addressing the Cambodian crisis and publicized Iowa SHARES in church bulletins. Churchgoers collected contributions by fasting, tithing, and holding silent

auctions. St. Johns High School in Independence announced a "pilgrimage" in which their self-proclaimed "Holy Strollers" would walk 80 miles from Independence to Guttenberg, to raise donations for Iowa SHARES and awareness of the Christian mission of helping others.

From the start, the Governor's Office had structured Iowa SHARES as a distinctively Iowan civic engagement, and many donors' comments reflected that appeal to state pride. The record harvest in 1979 showed off Iowa's agricultural power, while at the same time newspapers and television showed images of people elsewhere starving to death. One *Des Moines Register* columnist emphasized Iowa's opportunity as a leading farm state to feed not just the Midwest, but ideally the needy around the world. California resident Harvey Glasser declared that the push for Cambodian relief helped "restore" his joy in his Iowa roots. "[It] certainly breaks all stereotypes of Midwestern provincialism to find [that] this wonderful spirit of international consciousness and sensitivity to the plight . . . [of] these suffering people is not only shared but responded to by your generous contributors to Iowa Shares."

Others contributed to demonstrate support for Ray, who had enjoyed strong popularity since his initial election in 1968. Donor John Murray commented, "It is not my nature to write letters to political leaders. I am compelled to do so, however, by your activities on behalf of the hapless refugees. . . . Never have I been more proud of the conduct of any representative of my interests in the world." Fort Dodge teenager Tom Yetmar echoed that praise: "In a time when everything is up in the air such as inflation, energy, Iran, and the election you still have the time to go to Cambodia, and see for yourself the suffering. You really amaze me as a strong leader of the state of Iowa. I'm really happy to live in Iowa, I would like to thank you and your administration for making this a state to be proud of."

Noting the international political context of the refugee disaster, others supported Iowa SHARES as a way to extend America's Cold War fight against Soviet influence. Former intelligence officer Hugh Stafford of Tri State Toro Company recommended to Quinn that Iowa SHARES should send aid directly to Thailand as a "breadbasket" and crucial Cold War ally. Stafford worried that the Cambodian government might take advantage of the crisis to send spies and Communist agents to infiltrate refugee camps and destabilize the government of Thailand. He feared that any funds going through Cambodia's Communist government would ultimately backfire



COURTESY OF ROBERT D. RAY

Refugee mother and child, one of several compelling photographs taken in Southeast Asia by Governor Robert Ray.

"to the detriment of our allies." West Des Moines resident Jerry Johnson wanted to extend the scope of Iowa SHARES to fight Communist aggression even more widely, referring to the U.S. grain embargo after the Soviet Union's 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. Donations to nonprofit organizations like Iowa SHARES should be set up to flood grain into places where the Soviets encroached, Johnson suggested. Such food purchases would help Iowa farmers while weakening Soviet power and promoting America's global reputation after its post-Vietnam War slump.

**I**t was the international political dimension of Iowa SHARES that proved most controversial. Despite the heart-rending images, widespread publicity, and community support, a significant number of Iowans opposed Iowa SHARES. The most passionate backers of a Cold War hard line objected that the funds supported Cambodians whose Communist government took directives from Vietnamese Communists, who had just inflicted a humiliating defeat on the United States. A man from Ottumwa mailed in his Iowa SHARES coupon with a bold zero written in the donation line, adding angrily: "Not one penny to Cambodia or Gov. Ray am I going to give you. If we had won that war in south-

east asia and kept the Communists out they wouldn't have that trouble now. I am a world war ii veteran and 65 years of age."

Critics like this man blamed wartime Cambodians for helping smuggle provisions and troops along the Ho Chi Minh Trail; they now felt that Americans had no obligation to help deal with the consequences.

Similarly, a woman complained to the Governor's Office, "We have been reading for years that UNICEF MONEY GOES TO THE COMMUNISTS. With Vietnam a communist takeover, wont the same thing happen??? In Cambodia. Will your Governor be in for a possible embarrassment??? I hope not."

Other critics, within Iowa and nationwide, worried about American food and medicine falling into the hands of the Vietnamese Communists. Widespread rumors reported that Vietnamese trucks were hauling Cambodian refugee supplies into Vietnam. To counter such rumors, representatives from the Church World Services organization issued public statements. Since poorly built Cambodian roads became impassable during the wet season, they noted, cargo had to be trucked northeast through Vietnam before reaching refugee camps. Far from blocking aid, they said, the Vietnamese had opened up the Mekong River and local airports to speed up special shipments.

Skepticism persisted. In December a letter writer to the *Algona Upper Des Moines* maintained that Iowa SHARES donations had never reached Cambodian refugees. Through the media, Quinn flatly denied such charges. He pointed out that the Iowa SHARES program had just started and had not yet actually distributed any money; it was therefore impossible for its relief to have fallen into the wrong hands. Other Iowa citizens ignored or discounted such disturbing rumors, counting on what one called the "squeaky clean" record of Ray to see that their donations got to the right place.

Even as some critics worried that Iowa SHARES might end up bolstering Communism, observers on the other end of the political spectrum feared that aid might prolong the Cold War. Writing to the Governor's Office, members of the Consortium on International Peace and Reconciliation (CIPAR) stressed that paranoia about Communism should not trump humanitarian considerations. CIPAR chairperson Chester Guinn criticized Iowa SHARES for focusing relief efforts on Cambodians in Thailand, a non-Communist state, while overlooking greater need within Cambodia itself. CIPAR questioned whether Quinn's past political involvement with the State Department and U.S. military forces in Vietnam had biased his ideas about the allocation of funds. It warned that misguided relief

that only helped refugees fleeing to Thailand risked destabilizing Cambodia and worsening tension between the alliances of Soviet Union/Vietnam and China/Cambodia.

Ray's appeal to state pride and agricultural abundance wound up aggravating and alienating a farm woman who wrote that she felt "disgusted" with fundraising and media appeals for implying that all Iowa farmers were prosperous and therefore obliged to donate. She noted that the year's record crop of 1979 hardly made up for the prior year and the uncertainties of the next. After seeing an Iowa SHARES commercial featuring a farm family, she wrote to Ray, "Why don't you show the labor man receiving his large paycheck and then flash the picture of the starving [Cambodian] People? Why is it only the grain harvest? Let's show equal responsibility! . . . I am a farm wife, work hard, last year [1978] we had nearly no crop." In her opinion the campaign should emphasize that everyone should pitch in, not just farmers.

The largest group of opponents criticized Iowa SHARES for diverting funds from domestic needs. One Iowan wrote that the relief project "disturbed" him because "there are too many people in Iowa as well as the rest of the United States who will go hungry[,] possibly starve or freeze to death this winter because they have to make the choice between food or warmth." Others criticized Ray for focusing too much on issues thousands of miles away. Asserting that charity must begin at home, they pointed to local difficulties connected to the energy crisis, inflation, and growing unemployment. One suggested that relief money could be put to better use by building a para-transit system for Iowa's elderly and disabled.

Other skeptics feared that the Iowa SHARES initiative might bring more refugees to Iowa. A *Des Moines Register* poll in September 1979 (this was before Ray visited Southeast Asia) revealed that more than half of all Iowans polled opposed additional resettlement of refugees in the state. The state economy had taken a downturn, and some worried that the newcomers took jobs from Americans and imposed additional burdens on the welfare system.

This attitude was not unique to opponents of Iowa SHARES. On December 4, the nationally syndicated column of Paul Harvey (which appeared in the *Clinton Herald* and other Iowa papers) railed against "extend[ing] charity to other than homefolks" and "a new church emphasis on resettling Indochinese in the United States." Exemplifying a common anti-immigrant rhetoric, Harvey continued, "Some bring with them old world ways in diametrical contradiction to

ours. They buy and sell their teen-age daughters; they skin and eat dogs and cats; they ravage our fishing grounds. Transporting them here is cruel to them and a rude affront to our own jobless."

Such hostility to refugee resettlement spilled over into the Iowa SHARES campaign. On a donation coupon sent anonymously, the line "Yes, I'd Like to Share" was altered to read "Yes, I'd Like to ship everyone back," with the comment, "Those men go back to their country and fight for it instead of coming here and live off of us for nothing." Another Iowan wrote, "These people don't belong in our country. . . . We don't need more people. . . . Maybe they have by their own actions and complacency permitted these situations to happen."

Even one of Ray's fellow governors objected. After reading Quinn's publicity promoting Iowa SHARES, Governor William Janklow of South Dakota wrote to Ray, "I wholeheartedly endorse the efforts being made by private agencies and certain federal agencies to accommodate immigrants." But he added, "Despite my personal feelings of compassion, I honestly believe it would be improper for a state government to initiate a private fundraising effort. There are many private charity organizations in South Dakota. We cooperate with them in proclaiming weeks in their honor and helping them with publicity. However, we do not actively promote one charity more than any other." Janklow interpreted Iowa SHARES to be at the least a misuse, and at the worst, an abuse of the governor's power. For Janklow, a governor's creation and promotion of one charity over others led to conflicts of interest. It diverted a governor from attending to the issues brought up by the voters and infringed upon the domains of private charities.

**A**lthough the political dimensions of Iowa SHARES stirred up deep reactions, pro and con, the ultimate purpose, of course, was a humanitarian one. The money raised in the 17-month campaign accomplished a number of immediate results: rehabilitation of three rural hospital dispensaries in the Kandal Province; creation of two rural orphanages in Svey Rieng and Prey Veng; and completion of a nine-truck Christmas convoy carrying rice, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, and medicine to the neediest populations. American donations helped purchase K-MIX-2, a concentrated nutrition source that brought people back from the brink of starvation, and two medical teams were sent over.

By healing Cambodian refugees through participation in Iowa SHARES, Iowans hoped to find a way

to heal themselves—from the wounds of the Vietnam War and the disillusionment of the Watergate debacle.

Even public officials like Quinn had felt the stigma of being associated with the U.S. government. Prior to the turbulent Vietnam era, Quinn had believed that “the White House was always the symbol of all that was right and good of our country. The presidents were all noble people to be emulated.” But during the Watergate scandal, he realized how much ordinary citizens felt betrayed by their officials. He recalled that when he had used a White House identification card at a store in Washington, the clerk snapped, “That’s nothing to be proud of.”

Quinn’s work with Iowa SHARES renewed his self-image as a public official: “I felt so proud to be a part of Iowa and Iowa government and Governor Ray’s administration because of our work on refugees.”

Iowa State University student David Kalianov was profoundly affected by William Shawcross’s 1979 book *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia*. “It was my personal introduction to the notion that what we believe to be true, as told to us by the powers that be, may not be truth at all,” he later remembered. “I could not help but ponder what the children of Cambodia must think of us. And after reading *Sideshow*, I did not know what to think of us either.”

That dismay comes through in the first verse of Kalianov’s song “Child of Cambodia”:

*Child of Cambodia,  
what do you think when you think of U.S.?  
Oh Child of Cambodia,  
do you see compassion, or the reach of love?  
For we live in a way, that sometimes,  
Blinds our eyes, from the painful cries,  
Of a people that live in a world much less than ours.*

Kalianov was appalled by the U.S. role in first creating misery in Cambodia—between 1970 and 1973, U.S. forces dropped nearly 540,000 tons of munitions onto Cambodia to weaken Vietnamese supply lines—and then in being deaf to the “painful cries” of the Cambodians. But he did not believe that Americans were bad at heart, and when the Governor’s Office launched Iowa SHARES, Kalianov said, “It gave me a renewed sense of us.” The final verse of his song stresses the promise represented by Iowans giving and helping:

*Child of Cambodia,  
what do you think when you think of us?  
Oh Child of Cambodia,*

*help us to remember we were made for love.  
It is in giving, that we receive,  
And by helping you, make it through,  
These painful times in your world much less than ours.*

Iowa SHARES could not end all controversy or uncertainty about how the United States might act in a world still torn by Cold War suspicions. In fact, for some Iowans, it fed into and even fanned mistrust of foreigners and relief programs. Nevertheless, in seeking to alleviate the suffering of refugees thousands of miles away, Robert Ray’s leadership and the Iowa SHARES project served to preserve faith in government for at least some Iowans during tumultuous times. The project allowed Republicans and Democrats, hawks and doves, Christians and Jews, young and old, rich and poor, to rally behind a singular humanitarian cause. ❖

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**Dozens of photographs taken by Robert D. Ray, like those on pages 101 and 107, are showcased in *Robert D. Ray: An Iowa Treasure*. A passionate photographer, Ray takes the viewer on a “historical tour of Iowa and the world.” To order, please visit [www.keeptowabeautiful.com](http://www.keeptowabeautiful.com).**

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

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Annotations to this article are housed in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files, SHSI (Iowa City).