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IMMIGRATION, AND REFUGEES  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON SPACE

**H.R. 3844 -- HAITIAN REFUGEES**

Dear Colleague,

This Wednesday we will consider legislation concerning repatriation of Haitian refugees. Before we vote we should each ask ourselves two questions: is current U.S. policy adequately protecting Haitians who have a legitimate fear of persecution; and can the U.S. afford to accept economic refugees from Haiti.

**HAITIAN REFUGEES ARE BEING PROTECTED BY CURRENT U.S. POLICY**

All Haitians who flee their homeland and are rescued by the U.S. Coast Guard are thorough interviewed by the Immigration Service to determine if they have a plausible claim to asylum. To date, over 4,800 Haitians have been screened into the U.S. This figure represents about 35 percent of all those interviewed.

There have been no confirmed reports of returnees being persecuted. Tales of abuse and torture you may have heard about have all proved false when specific names are given and the cases are investigated. In at least two cases, State Department officials had tea with people who had reportedly been killed.

**THE U.S. CAN'T AFFORD TO ACCEPT ECONOMIC REFUGEES**

There is no doubt that conditions in Haiti are bad. We can all understand why so many people would leave Haiti to make a better life for themselves and their families. Unfortunately, we cannot afford to bring all of these people into the country. If we did, we would be compelled by fairness and consistency to accept millions of other economic refugees from Mexico, Russia, and other parts of the world.

**BECAUSE HAITIAN REFUGEES ARE ALREADY PROTECTED AND BECAUSE WE CANNOT AFFORD TO ACCEPT ECONOMIC REFUGEES WE DO NOT NEED TO CHANGE CURRENT POLICY TOWARD HAITIAN REFUGEES**

I realize that not all of my colleagues share my belief that Haitian refugees are protected from persecution. Those of you who do not should realize that as reported by the Judiciary Committee, H.R. 3844 will not stop the repatriation of Haitians currently fleeing their country.

The bill only affects people who were already in U.S. custody by February 5. There are currently about 2,500 such people being held in Guantanamo and those people are being repatriated at a rate of 1,000 per week. By the time the bill could be signed into law it would protect no one. Nothing in the bill prevents sending people currently leaving Haiti from being sent back.

Passage of H.R. 3844 undoubtedly give false hope to economic refugees in Haiti who will be encouraged to embark on a journey that may end at sea.

**H.R. 3844 MAY BE GOOD FOR POLITICAL POSTURING, BUT IT IS BAD FOR HAITIANS**

Sincerely,

Lamar Smith  
Member of Congress