Before You Embrace Socialism, Listen to Someone Who Escaped Communism

By Hung Mai, P.E., A Vietnamese Refugee, Tampa, Florida

To young Americans who believe socialism promises a fairer and more compassionate world, I ask you to consider my family's experience.

After the fall of Saigon in April 1975, I suffered under Vietnam's communist regime for three and a half years. Suffering in the detention camp (the communist called Re-education camp). Eventually, I and my brother (a former lieutenant in the old Vietnamese Army) bought a small river boat, repaired it for a fishing boat, get the fishing license and go fishing for over 6 months to save enough fuel for an ocean voyage. Left Vietnam in Mekong River, with five children and eighteen adults, we faced rough seas, trip was planned for 3 days and 3 nights, it became seven days and 6 nights, drifting in the ocean toward Thailand and the terrifying experience of running out of food and drinking water.

Pirates attacked twice and took our boat forcing all of us to swim to the shoreline in a dark night.
During the pirates' seizure of our boat, my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter was dropped into the ocean. Imagine the terror of that moment. Then ask yourself: What would make a father believe that taking his family onto the open sea was their best hope for a future?

For me, freedom was worth that desperate risk.

Here are five lessons I hope you will consider.

1. Beautiful socialism promises do not guarantee humane results.
Equality, fairness, and an end to poverty are appealing goals. But an ideology must be judged by what happens when its leaders gain power.

Can people criticize the government? Can they practice their religion, own a business, keep their property, buy food and necessities without quotas, and not stand in line for all day? Can children not be forced to spy on parents and report to government officials? Can people choose their leaders?

A government's promise to care for everyone means little if citizens lose the freedom to question what it does.

2. Tens of millions have died under communist regimes pursuing visions of a socialist utopia.
These deaths included executions, forced labor, persecution, and catastrophic famines associated with government policies. China's Great Leap Forward alone resulted in famine deaths estimated in the tens of millions. In Cambodia, nearly two million people died under the Khmer Rouge's effort to radically remake society. Exact estimates vary, but the enormous human cost is beyond dispute. These victims were parents, children, farmers, teachers, and workers. Their suffering deserves more than dismissal as an unfortunate mistake in the pursuit of an ideal.

When a regime treats human lives as expendable in building its promised future, the promise itself must be questioned.

3. We need a wealthier world—not merely the redistribution of existing wealth.
Dividing what already exists cannot, by itself, produce more food, build more homes, develop medicines, or create lasting prosperity. Those things require work, knowledge, investment, innovation, and the opportunity to build something better.

Helping people through hardship matters. But our ambition should be greater than sharing scarcity. We should expand opportunities so more people can earn a living, own a home, build a business, and provide for their

children. I believe a compassionate society should protect people in need while encouraging the initiative that creates prosperity.

4. Concentrated power can turn a promise of equality into a system of obedience.
When government controls people's livelihoods and suppresses political opposition, citizens can lose both economic independence and the means to challenge abuse. Ask who will hold the leaders accountable. Ask whether you will still have the right to disagree after they gain the power they seek. No leader should receive unquestioned authority simply because the stated goal sounds generous.

5. Protect Freedom-Socialism has never worked.
Socialism and communism are not identical, and public assistance does not by itself make a country communist. But my experience has convinced me to be deeply wary of socialist promises used to justify sweeping government control and the erosion of individual rights.

My warning is about the distance between an ideology's promises, and the reality people may be forced to endure. Study the ideas but also listen to the survivors. Ask why so many families risked imprisonment, pirates, hunger, and death to escape.

One of the most critical pieces of evidence against socialism is that despite the fact numerous countries around the world have attempted to create societies in which many, most, or all industries are collectively owned and managed, those countries have never prospered.

The ultimate goal of socialism, according to Karl Marx, is to create a society in which all people share wealth equally. But whenever socialism has been attempted, it has always resulted in tyranny.

The reason for this is simple: For society to collectively share wealth, a ruling class first must be established that will take wealth away from those who have it. That necessitates giving significant power to a centralized authority, the government. Once government has this power, it is reluctant to give it up, resulting in the sort of oppression we see today in Cuba, North Korea, and Venezuela.

I want young Americans to care about others. I also want them to understand that compassion must be joined with freedom, accountability, and the opportunity to create a better life. History has proven repeatedly that you do not create wealth by stealing it from some to give it to others. I risked the ocean because I wanted my daughter to grow up free and have a good life. Before you embrace an ideology's promises, listen to those who lived through its consequences.

Thanks to free markets and capitalism, which has been occurring over the past 250 years at swift speed. The last thing we need is a socialist like David Jolly and Angie Nixon getting in the way. **That why I urge young people, immigrants, refugees, and Asian Americans, like me, to vote for Governor Candidate Byron Donalds and Senator Ashley Moody.**