

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO IS A STORY OF RECKLESS IMMIGRATION POLICY THAT HAS NEGATIVELY AFFECTED LOCAL RESIDENTS AND EXPLOITS MIGRANT WORKERS

The following is information we received from a high government source that is continuing to collect data on the expense and negative impacts the Biden Administration's reckless policies are having here in the homeland in Ohio.

- According to this source, of the 20,000 Haitian migrants that have been dropped into the small Ohio town of Springfield, Ohio in Clark County, 6,000 have applied for and are receiving Medicaid benefits.
- 4,000 are receiving Welfare benefits through the county social service program.
- 1,700 additional students (Haitians) that speak five different dialects have been dropped into the local public schools, creating a myriad of challenges for students and teachers.
- Local hospital emergency rooms are overwhelmed, and the hospitals are dealing with high numbers of HIV and tuberculosis patients.
- Haitian immigrants are receiving temporary driver licenses, and their Creole interpreters are helping them pass the test; they don't know how to drive, and there have been many auto crashes in the past 24 months in and around Springfield – so much so that the insurance companies are dropping their coverage of the local residents. This is according to public testimony in the Springfield Council meeting.
- Haitian immigrants are living in dilapidated inner-city homes that normally would have been condemned, as they have come to Springfield to work in agricultural manufacturing. *(from the Jewish Journal Article)*

The following articles in order in this PDF for your reading on the subject are as follows:

A very important message on the magnitude of the Haitian immigration crisis in the Springfield area from Kyle Kohler,

Exclusive: Feds and State AG Investigate Alleged Human Trafficking Empire Run in Springfield, Ohio, for Years by 'King George' - Jewish Journal

Governor DeWine's Op Ed in the New York Times on Sunday, September 22

Special note: We are providing this information for you to read for yourself and judge by the numbers about what is happening in this Ohio small town. Governor DeWine rightly expresses compassion for the Haitian immigrants. Where the Governor has gone wrong is that he shows no compassion for the residents who are having to endure this influx into their city with the many complicated problems it presents for local residents.

We provide this information because this issue is not going away, and we will be dealing with it for some time to come.

Other Ohio communities are receiving the illegal immigrants that are pouring over the southern border without being properly vetted or processed by our federal government. That is what is being debated on the national stage in the Presidential Election of 2024.

Senator JD Vance is right in saying that the dog and cat memes have drawn attention to a bigger problem, the human crisis at our southern border that has now filtered into our towns and cities where we live. Government officials are posturing and maneuvering in their narratives so that you don't pay attention to how they have failed us when this problem has come to our doorsteps.

Pray for the people of Springfield. They are in need of our prayers and support.

Sincerely,

Chris Long – President, Ohio Christian Alliance

A very important message on the magnitude of the Haitian immigration crisis in the Springfield area from Kyle Kohler, a former State Representative from Springfield and the Clark County area. I knew it was bad, but didn't know it was THIS bad. Prepare to be shocked: "My name is Kyle Koehler, and I am a former State Representative for Springfield Ohio and the Clark County area. I am currently a candidate for the State Senate covering Clark, Greene and Clinton Counties.

Over the last four years Haitians who are crossing the border (or in fact, flown to our country as refugees) ... have been given Temporary Protected Status by the Federal Government. Under the Biden/Harris administration – they not only are protected but they are given between \$600 to \$1600/MONTH on Debit Cards through the Refugee Cash Assistance program and allowed access to all the public assistance programs available to US citizens

Since early 2020, a temporary staffing company in Springfield, started actively bringing Haitian refugees to our city. First a few hundred, then thousands. As of this month, our local Job and Family Services has registered over 20,000 Haitian refugees in our county and city. Springfield, which had a steady population of 58,000...now has an additional 20,000 new residents in and around Springfield. 20,000 people in just under four years

Our public school system (with just over 8,000 students) suddenly has over 1,600 non-English speaking students. Nineteen-year-old Haitian men and women are being enrolled as high-school freshman and are in class with 13-year-old boys and girls.

The staffing company that started this “migration” is owned by a man that has over 63 rental properties in the Springfield area. Instead of getting the normal \$600-\$800 in rent each month, he rents cots for \$250/month to as many as 20 to 25 Haitians per home. He charges them \$25 for roundtrips to work each day. They work under contracts preventing them from being hired full time at their place of employment. This AND the barrier of not speaking English causes them to become basically indentured servants in my opinion.

Since no one over the age of 18 requires driver's education in Ohio – Haitians are allowed to take the permit test with an interpreter... who basically gives them all the answers. Since “permit” in the Haitian language of Creole is interpreted “permission” most never take the actual driving test. This means hundreds of Haitians, who cannot speak English and have no idea what the driving laws actually say... are NOW causing accidents all over our community. There are Facebook pages created by individuals dedicated to reporting accidents involving Haitians. The number of overturned cars being reported each day on streets where the speed limits are 35MPH or less... would shock you.

One year ago, a Haitian man pulled in front of the school bus causing the bus to overturn, ejecting children and resulting in the death of an 11-year-old student.

Our county health department has reported an increase in HIV cases over the last five years. Based on their numbers we will hit an increase of 871% over the previous five years. Nurses have confirmed that an entire wing of our regional hospital has nothing but Haitian patients being treated for HIV.

A delivery nurse reports that 70% of all scheduled Cesareans are for Haitian women who cannot deliver naturally because of HIV.

TB cases are up over 500% for this same period.

Our Federally Qualified Health Care (FQHC) called Rocking Horse is overwhelmed with the increase in Haitians that are automatically qualified for Medicaid services.

Our public safety officials have confirmed that charges against most Haitians who break the law are almost immediately dismissed because of lack of translators... meaning that courts cannot provide a speedy trial, so they are simply arrested and released.

City, county, and state leaders are overwhelmed with complaints that they can do very little about fixing.

Last month, a group calling themselves the "Blood Tribe" marched past a Jazz and Blues Festival carrying large Swastika flags and rifles. Their leader showed up last week at a city commission meeting and publicly warned the mayor of impending "savagery" if he didn't stop the migration of Haitians to our community.

I told you I was bringing the bad news.

Let me tell you this is NOT about race. As a grandfather of seven children... FIVE OF WHOM are wonderfully loved children of color, I can assure you this has nothing to do with race or the color of someone's skin.

I understand that these folks are fleeing a "hellhole" of a country run by gangs. They are thankful to be here. BUT OUR COMMUNITY simply cannot handle an influx of 20,000 new residents who do not understand our language, our culture, our laws, and are being treated (in my opinion) as indentured servants.

The bad news - is that the current administration has allowed millions of individuals to come across the border and (and in this case) even be flown into our country. Our communities in Ohio are only just beginning to understand the full impact of the last four years. Your community could be next."

Exclusive: Feds and State AG Investigate an Alleged Human Trafficking Empire Run in Springfield, Ohio, for Years by ‘King George’

Dispatches from Springfield, Ohio – The story in this town is not about cats or dogs. It’s about mules. It’s a twin tragedy of migrant workers from Haiti exploited and locals from Springfield marginalized. Just about every week since 2019, First Diversity Staffing Group Inc. has shuttled vulnerable Haitian migrants in unmarked white Ford and Chevy vans from Florida to Ohio, where they are allegedly exploited for cheap labor by companies like Dole Food Company Inc. It is a secretive and sinister operation that has gone unchecked for more than five years. The mastermind behind this scheme lives in a \$1.35 million mansion on Pawleys Plantation Court. His name is George Ten, but in that underworld, his nickname is "King George," because of his opulent lifestyle of luxury cars, cash handouts and fast-talk. For years, he has operated his reign of alleged exploitation openly and freely out of a former mansion on E. High Street.

By Asra Q. Nomani

Published September 18, 2024

To view previous dispatches, [click here](#).

SPRINGFIELD, Ohio – Last Saturday evening, I arrived at the Haitian Community Help and Support Center here on S. Yellow Springs Street, drawn by former President Donald Trump’s explosive claim in the presidential debate days earlier that migrants from Haiti are “eating the dogs, they’re eating the cats, they’re eating the pets of the people who live there.”

But in just 72 hours, I uncovered something sinister that is the real story in this town of about 58,000 locals and an estimated 15,000 migrant workers—a long-standing, hidden human trafficking network that has upended the lives of both the Haitian migrants and local residents. According to sources, with whistleblowers coming forward, FBI anti-trafficking agents and Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost are investigating the allegations of human trafficking in Springfield.

What began as my efforts to track down a rumor about animal cruelty has turned into an investigation that reveals a malignant system of labor exploitation involving a local businessman, George Ten, whom Haitians and local residents call “King George,” the chief executive at First Diversity Staffing Group Inc., a Springfield company that has been the tip of the spear in the alleged trafficking operation of Haitians to the town.

While Haitians have lived in homes condemned now with an “X” on the front door, he lives in a \$1.35 million mansion on Pawleys Plantation Court in a ritzy neighborhood called “Estates at Country Club of the North.”

A real estate listing shows the house features a wine cellar and other extravagances: “Over 10,000 Sf of pure elegance! Gorgeous 1st floor w/marble floored round foyer w/lighted dome, 1st floor owners suite, formal living/dining, study, Florida rm, & gourmet kitchen. 2nd floor w/3 br each w/full bath and loft area. W/O basement w/billiard room, cherry & Bubinga wood bar, media room, wine cellar, exercise, sauna, and rec rooms. 4 car attached garage. Covered veranda off back of home and large upper and lower patio w/golf course views!”





According to sources, the network has become so significant and, thus, drawn the attention of the area FBI field office and Ohio Attorney General Yost, with the whistleblowers revealing the inner secrets of this operation. According to sources, the FBI has binders of evidence documenting the properties owned by “King George” and the systematic transport of Haitian immigrants to Springfield, Ohio, in dilapidated, unmarked white vans from Florida and other states. The areas of investigation include the almost 50 homes that George owns in Springfield, housing the migrants in squalid conditions, under the name of a limited liability corporation. George oversees a spider’s web of at least 10 shell corporations that I’ve discovered through court records and sources say he uses them to funnel money, property and assets, including his Audi, Mercedes and Porsche cars.

This is a story of unchecked greed and cruelty, committed not by the immigrants, but *to* the immigrants, with local residents of Springfield also a casualty.

As most journalists learn through experience, things are rarely as they seem. When the allegation of migrants eating cats and dogs exploded across the media, I knew there was more beneath the surface. What began as an investigation into animal cruelty quickly revealed a much darker reality—a large-scale human trafficking operation.

I arrived in Springfield from my home in Morgantown, W.V., a town much like Springfield in size and scale. I wanted to get to the bottom of this story. I came to Springfield because I felt a connection to the immigrants and the locals here, both their stories echoing my own experience growing up uniting two worlds. I moved to

the U.S. with my brother when I was four years old, joining our parents as they made the difficult move in search of a better life, and when I was 10, we settled in West Virginia.

While the families around me had different identities, their ancestral stories were familiar—new immigrants from places like Italy, Germany and Ireland who came to work the coal mines. They pioneered foods like the pepperoni roll at Chico’s Bakery and survived in company towns, much like what it feels Springfield has become for the Haitian community. I honor the resilience and beauty of immigrants and small-town folks. I am doing this investigation as part of the Pearl Project, a nonprofit initiative dedicated to journalism in the public interest, named for my Wall Street Journal colleague and friend Daniel Pearl, whose Jewish parents also made a journey of immigration to the United States from Israel. Breaking typical journalism style, I will use first names in second reference because this is a story about a small town where folks are on a first name basis with each other, even “King George.”

What I discovered in Springfield is the tragic story of Haitian migrants exploited and local Springfield residents marginalized and sidelined by powerful interests in a wider and disturbing pattern of human trafficking and labor exploitation that has infiltrated Springfield since 2009. And with little recourse for the victimized and the disenfranchised.



The Rise of “King George”

The alleged trafficking network was orchestrated by George Ten, a local businessman who took over his family’s staffing business, First Diversity, after his father, Miguel Ten, faced legal trouble with the IRS, sources told me. I couldn’t get a hold of George but have left messages for him. Miguel answered my questions

thoughtfully and in a straightforward way.

Miguel said his wife and children were born in New York, and he moved to Delaware and then Ohio to work in human resources for Dole. In 2002, Miguel said, he started First Diversity out of his home and he said that he left George the business around 2010 when he became a pastor.

“I turned it over to him because the Lord called me to be a pastor about 2010. I turned everything over to him,” said Miguel, now a pastor at Life in Christ Community Church on Sunset Street in Springfield.

The company jingle is that First Diversity is a “leader in putting Americans back to work by providing Quality Staffing Solutions.” The company has grown to have new operations, where workers from Haiti are also allegedly funneled: Washington Court House, Ohio; Lima, Ohio; Sidney, Ohio; Huber Heights, Ohio; Gastonia, N.C.; and Charlotte, N.C..

He said his son wasn’t involved in alleged human trafficking. “Well, you know, to be honest with you, this I know, the city and the companies had a shortage of people. They put pressure on not only First Diversity,” but also another employment agency, “to get employees because they didn’t have anybody to work. The companies needed people and we didn’t have enough people.”

Hispanic and Mexican laborers were illegal, he said. “The Haitians were legal.”

He never heard the nickname “King George,” he said. “This is the first time that I am hearing something like that. That is new to me.”

Around 2008, Miguel hired a local businessman, Bruce Smith, as a company executive.

Miguel said, “My son is a good smart young man. I wanted to make sure that he got his degree.” George got a master’s degree in finance, he said.

Sources say Bruce is troubled by the direction the business has taken but keeps his job as vice president and leads in negotiating contracts with employers who hire the Haitian migrants and others. Bruce couldn’t be reached for comment.

George’s wealth and lifestyle, with its fleet of luxury cars, stand in stark contrast to the lives of the migrants he allegedly exploits, many of whom live in squalid conditions.

Sources say that George put a benign face on his operation. He typically started the day around 9 a.m. with “kumbaya” circle time with employees, giving them an intense pep talk, barely breaking a smile, putting his hand into the circle for others to follow and break with a cheer, followed by everyone going to their corners to

hustle jobs for migrants from Haiti. He dumped his records in cardboard banker's boxes in the building's basement, refusing efforts by staff to digitize his records, often paying workers with cash under the table, sources said.

When a new applicant arrived to join his own staff – not the hourly jobs at the local plants and warehouses – he would sit awkwardly in silence in a conference room with glass windows and then ask, “Tell me about yourself.”

After the applicant finished, he handed them a self-help book and sent them off with the homework assignment to read the book and report back on the steps for self-improvement the applicant would take. Only then would the applicant be hired.

Then, if a squabble ever emerged, he said, “You're not paid enough to question me,” and handed the employee another self-help book with the instructions for self-improvement.



Not Cats or Dogs, but Mules

As I did my reporting, the stories of cats and dogs being eaten were magnified by Trump's running mate, Ohio Senator J.D. Vance, and, on the other side, Vice President Kamala Harris called the allegations about cats and dogs eaten a "crying shame."

With a Democratic federal government led by President Joe Biden and a Republican state government led by Gov. Mike Dewine, an uncomfortable political reality lies below the surface for all. The rhetoric should move from dispelling or propping up the cats-and-dog story and focus on the human tragedy in Springfield. Neither the citizens nor the migrants should be the demagogues. Neither should be vilified. But rather the problem investigated and corrected – from the top.

As national media reporters descended on the streets of Springfield, I drove the side streets and E. High Street and tracked the unmarked white vans used by George and First Diversity, transporting Haitian migrants to their jobs at Dole and other companies. It only takes studying the flow of operations for a few days to see First Diversity's business relies on the Haitian migrants. A steady flow of Haitian migrants go through the doors of First Diversity between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., sitting sometimes on the stone wall outside and walking inside with a seriousness and sometimes it seems a hopefulness. Behind the building, an empty can of ServicePro antifreeze litters the parking lot, beside a rat trap and a can of Twisted Tea on a window sill, not far from an unmarked white van.

These vans have become a familiar sight in town, with locals seeing them serviced every Sunday at Jim's Tire and Service Center at the corner of W. Selma Road and Vine Street, advertising "The Best Priced Tread in Town!"

Through this network, George has acted as a domestic "mule" in the labor trafficking system, moving vulnerable migrant workers across state lines for economic gain. Much like drug mules, labor mules transport people to exploit them for profit, treating human beings as commodities in a multibillion-dollar industry.

In June 2019, employees of First Diversity were directed to stop hiring locals and focus on recruiting Haitian migrants, sources said. A new routine developed in town. George dispatched unmarked white vans to remote locations in Florida to bring workers from Haiti to Springfield, sources said. One worker said he paid a fee of about \$50 for the ride. The scenes in the town became bizarre: I watched the driver of one white van drop a man off at a rundown house with three black trash bags filled with things.

Once they arrived in Springfield, the migrants were packed into dilapidated houses owned by one of Ten's many companies. I have mapped 45 such properties around town, including at least three homes that were purchased on the same day, Sept. 10, 2020, for \$20,000, \$28,000 and \$32,000. These homes are overcrowded, often shared in shifts among the migrants, some of whom had no stable place to stay and carried all their belongings in backpacks.

In the morning, drivers in the white vans would pick up the men at their homes or at the First Diversity offices at the E. High Street mansion, painted a muted tan, and deposit them at the far end of town in the distribution center, where companies like Dole Foods hired them at cheap rates.

One Haitian man I interviewed asked to be anonymous for fear of retaliation and recalled how he was picked up by a driver for one of Ten’s vans on a street corner near a Winn-Dixie grocery store in Immokalee, Florida. After the long journey to Springfield, he was dropped off at a rundown home on Rice Street, infested with cockroaches. He soon found work through First Diversity at Jefferson Industries Corporation, earning \$12.50 an hour; he didn’t know how much George skimmed off his wages. The home he lived in had no working heat, and he bought an electric heater to survive the cold Ohio winter, the heater barely heating his room.



A Tragic Death, A Town in Despair

The labor trafficking operation run by “King George” has not only exploited vulnerable Haitian migrants, but it has also strained the resources of Springfield and created deep divisions within the community, with the fissures erupting against the vitriolic landscape of the presidential race, because now the immigrants and the locals are being exploited again, this time by the political candidates.

Local residents have watched helplessly as the number of migrants skyrocketed, rental prices soared, and apartments were transformed into overcrowded tenements. Many locals have seen their medical facilities, like Rocking Horse Medical Center—which accepts Medicaid—overrun with patients, and grocery store shelves often emptied, leaving residents without basic necessities.

As part of my reporting, I watched a recorded Springfield City Commission hearing from Aug. 29, 2023, where tensions finally erupted. The hearing followed a tragic accident in which a Haitian migrant, respected in the Haitian community, said the sun got in his eyes, causing a school bus to swerve and flip.

Tragically, in that crash – on the first day of school, a young boy, Aiden Clark, 11, was killed, and a few dozen townspeople exploded in anger, demanding answers from the city’s leaders. The mayor at the time, Warren Copeland, a local professor, chastised the outraged citizens for their hostility. He yelled at them for speaking out of turn.

At one point, a local, Mark Saunders, stepped forward and asked the commissioners if they knew about “George” and First Diversity. “You know George Ten, First Diversity Staffing owns 43 houses in Springfield. You have your landlord registry. You have a code enforcement.” He asked them to visit the houses and check the cuts George was getting from the wages of migrant workers.

“It’s nothing more than indentured servitude and that’s illegal.”

The commissioners and city manager acted like they were unaware of the details Saunders was providing.

This didn’t go over well with locals frustrated. Saunders is a little legend in the community for the origin story on how he started driving school buses. When his daughter said she was afraid of riding the school bus (long before the crash), her dad asked her what would make her feel better. She told him: if he was behind the wheel. He learned to drive a school bus.

The day of the crash, he told the commissioners, his daughter sent him a text: “Dad, it’s not us. I love you.”

It was heartbreaking and painful to watch the citizenry so marginalized.

Months later, in January, the mayor died of a heart attack, replaced by Rob Rue, the owner of Littleton & Rue Funeral Home, which handled the services for young Aiden. Rue had been the vice mayor while this crisis had unfolded in the city.

The commission’s silence over this past year marked another chapter in the growing frustration among locals who have seen their town transformed without any meaningful intervention from officials. Many suspect corruption, kickbacks and a cover-up of the exploitation that has festered for years under the watch of local authorities. City officials say they have been overwhelmed and deny the allegations of malfeasance.



Voices Unheard, Exploitation Ignored

The exploitation of the Haitian migrants has been an open secret in Springfield for years, but few have dared to speak up. In my interviews with local residents, I learned that many people fear retribution, and their voices are silenced by the power and influence of people like Ten.

The migrants, too, have been left in a precarious situation, caught between their hope for a better life in America and the brutal reality of allegedly being trafficked for labor. In this town, political and economic malpractice have collided, creating a no-win situation for everyone involved.

Despite this unfortunate reality, I have also seen the kindness of Springfield's residents and the resilience of the Haitian migrants.

I met one local man, Christopher Merrill, 41, a truck driver, in the gravel parking lot of the Haitian Community Help and Support Center when I first arrived in town. It was a bit of theater at the beginning. He came in a little hot with a social media provocateur, Nick Sortor, beside him, asking difficult questions but within moments, away from the theater, I witnessed a remarkable act: a local Haitian American grandmother, Margery Koveleski, spoke to Merrill kindly and gently and honestly – Yes, it was too much that Haitians are sleeping in shifts on beds, overcharged for rentals. Yes, they needed driving lessons. No, they don't eat cats or dogs and that would be sick if they did. Merrill responded in kind.

“Can I give you a hug?” Margery asked. She is the first known person to move to Springfield, arriving here from New York City with her husband and family for a simpler life after the 9/11 attacks. Her grandmother had emigrated to New York from Haiti years earlier.

“Yes,” Christopher responded.

They hugged in a soft, authentic moment. When the influx of Haitians arrived as migrants, she started helping them as a translator and de facto guardian angel, one time saving a mother and her child from the traps of trafficking that had become sexual exploitation. As a local, Margery knows the town is stretched thin.

A security officer for MSNBC called the police, and the scene turned awkward but everyone went home with a handshake, exchanging phone numbers to stay in touch. Margery extended her hand to Nick, and they shook hands.



Over the next 72 hours, Chris drove with me block after block, sometimes in his pickup truck, introducing me to the community, sharing stories of the struggles they’ve faced and expressing compassion and care for the migrants who have arrived in Springfield. He arrived in Springfield some years ago after marrying a local when he was living in North Carolina. While separated now, they co-parent peacefully and seek a peaceful community for their daughter, 10, and other families.

At one moment, Chris took me down an alley off S. Center Street. He stopped at a memorial dedicated to his friend Justin Smith, who was murdered in a local crime that went unsolved for months due to an overburdened police force stretched thin by the increasing demands of the migrant population. His body rotted naked, dumped in a red truck behind an abandoned house on S. Center Street.



“What we’re witnessing in Springfield is modern-day slavery,” said Chris. “It’s not fair to the people from Haiti. And meanwhile the people of Springfield are also suffering. There isn’t enough funding to help the people of Springfield. It’s all dried up and the money is going into somebody’s wallets. Where is the money going?”

During my time in Springfield, I spent hours with Haitian migrants and local families, listening to both their stories of struggle and survival. Kyle Koeler, a local businessman running for state office, told me: “I am shocked that much of what we are experiencing has been orchestrated by employment agencies who never informed our community leaders about the workers they brought to Springfield.”

“While profiting off the labor of thousands of Haitians, these temp agencies failed to inform our schools, our healthcare providers, our local health department or really anyone for that matter. These types of actions bring into question whether they are operating with the best interest of our community – but even more importantly, the interest of the impoverished individuals they seem to be taking advantage of.”

Today, I sat with the grandmother – Margery – who gave Chris a hug, as she and her daughter, Laura, helped Haitians in a makeshift office they set up some months ago at the back of the local Haitian grocery store on S. Limestone Street, a gathering place for migrants seeking help, amid shelves filled with Haitian favorites like

homemade peanut brittle, a special vanilla flavoring and bread from Park Bakery in Lake Park, Fla. A steady stream of people arrived with soft smiles and furrowed brows, each with their own hardships.

A man arrived and told Margery he needed to speak to her. “Private,” he whispered.

She returned crestfallen. “Haitians are leaving,” she said. They only have their dignity, she said. And it has been trampled upon in the accusations about cats and dogs.

Still, the ebb and flow of migration continues to Springfield. One Haitian woman, whose daughter and two others had been released to Mexico after a months-long journey from Haiti, desperately needed help arranging a flight for her daughter and two others to Springfield. After some technical difficulties, Laura managed to book the flight, and the woman beamed with relief when the confirmation QR code finally loaded.

The three new arrivals are set to land at Dayton Airport late Wednesday morning—a small victory for her family in a long and grueling process. And, yet, a new challenge for the city, still struggling.



A Broken System and a National Crisis

The situation in Springfield is seen across the nation but hardly ever chronicled as it is now because of the national spotlight on the town.

This story is about the human condition in this town as a symptom of a deeper malignancy.

Across the country, towns like this, from California to Pennsylvania, are grappling with the consequences of labor trafficking, as vulnerable populations are preyed upon by those seeking to profit off their desperation. This is a national crisis that demands immediate attention and reform, particularly in how migrant workers are treated in these industries of exploitation and how communities are expected to silently absorb new entries while already seriously overburdened.

Into a new day in this small town, it is clear that Springfield, Ohio, is a microcosm of a much larger problem. The system has failed, both in protecting the migrants who seek a better life and the local communities that bear the brunt of this unchecked exploitation.

The greed of individuals like “King George” has fueled a tragic cycle of human suffering, and it is time for these injustices to be exposed and corrected in a spirit of healing, dignity and grace.

What started as a bizarre claim about migrants eating pets led me to uncover the dark and disturbing truth of a labor trafficking operation. The people of Springfield, both locals and migrants, have become casualties in the pursuit of profit. The kindness and hope I witnessed stand in stark contrast to the greed and cruelty of those at the top. Springfield may be just one town, but its story reflects a national crisis of exploitation that must be addressed.

As she nosed her car north on S. Limestone Street, Margery studied the sidewalks, sad but still hopeful. She is thinking of starting a nonprofit initiative, Nana’s House, in the spirit of her grandmother, who was loving and kind, so she can bring more services and support to both the Haitian and the local community, building bridges and cross-cultural understanding. I handed her daughter my phone to play with a possible graphic on my Canva account.

The vision they settled on was simple, “Bridging Cultures, Building Bonds.”

As Margery turned toward City Hall, she caught sight of two television reporters recording their live shots in front of their cameras. On these streets, Haitians and locals would keep crossing paths and intersecting, just as she did with Chris, the truck driver, whose friend was murdered.

From behind the wheel, driving past the courthouse and police station, Margery looked ahead and said softly, “We must keep on trying. We are *all* human beings.”

Asra Q. Nomani is a former Wall Street Journal reporter and the founder of the Pearl Project, a nonprofit journalism initiative. If you want to support this continued coverage, please donate to the Pearl Project at this link. Asra can be reached at asra@asranomani.com and @AsraNomani on the X platform and other social media platforms. She invites your tips, suggestions and feedback. If you'd like to support the vision of Nana's House, please contact her. She will continue filing dispatches from...the road. To read her collection of dispatches, go to JewishJournal.com/DispatchesFrom.

GUEST ESSAY

I'm the Republican Governor of Ohio. Here Is the Truth About Springfield.

Sept. 20, 2024

By **Mike DeWine**

Mr. DeWine, a Republican, is the governor of Ohio.

I was born in Springfield, Ohio. My wife, Fran, and I have lived our entire lives less than 10 miles from this city.

When we were dating in high school, we would go there to see movies at the Regent or State Theater or to eat fried clams at Howard Johnson's. I remember Fran taking the bus about eight miles from our hometown, Yellow Springs, to Springfield to shop at Wren's Department Store. Over the years, we've eaten countless doughnuts from Schuler's Bakery, worshiped at St. Raphael Catholic Church and we logged many work hours there when I represented Springfield in the U.S. House and Senate.

Springfield has a rich history of providing refuge for the oppressed and being a place of opportunity. As a stop on the Underground Railroad, the Gammon House, which still stands, was a safe haven for escaped slaves seeking freedom. And, as a stop on the Old National Road, America's first east/west federal highway, Springfield attracted many settlers both before and after the Civil War. Immigrants from Ireland, Greece, Germany, Italy and other countries helped build the city into what it is today.

For a long time, commerce and manufacturing flourished in Springfield, which earned the title “Champion City” after the founding there of the agriculture implement giant Champion Machine Company.

But the city hit tough times in the 1980s and 1990s, falling into serious economic decline as manufacturing, rail commerce and good-paying jobs dwindled. Now, however, Springfield is having a resurgence in manufacturing and job creation. Some of that is thanks to the dramatic influx of Haitian migrants who have arrived in the city over the past three years to fill jobs.

They are there legally. They are there to work.

It is disappointing to me that Springfield has become the epicenter of vitriol over America’s immigration policy, because it has long been a community of great diversity. Fran and I were reminded of this when we attended Mass at St. Raphael this past Sunday and stopped at the nearby Groceryland on our way home. We talked with community members from many backgrounds who are understandably concerned about the negative things being said about their city in news reports and on social media.

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Bomb threats — all hoaxes — continue and temporarily closed at least two schools, put the hospital on lockdown and shuttered City Hall. The two local colleges have gone remote. I have posted Ohio Highway Patrol troopers in each school building in Springfield so the schools can remain open, teachers and children can feel safe and students can continue to learn. On the troopers’ first day in the schools, Fran and I visited Simon Kenton Elementary, where reassured teachers told us: “Yesterday was rough. Today was a good day.”

As a supporter of former President Donald Trump and Senator JD Vance, I am saddened by how they and others continue to repeat claims that lack evidence and disparage the legal migrants living in Springfield. This rhetoric hurts the city and its people, and it hurts those who have spent their lives there.

The Biden administration's failure to control the southern border is a very important issue that Mr. Trump and Mr. Vance are talking about and one that the American people are rightfully deeply concerned about. But their verbal attacks against these Haitians — who are legally present in the United States — dilute and cloud what should be a winning argument about the border.

The Springfield I know is not the one you hear about in social media rumors. It is a city made up of good, decent, welcoming people. They are hard workers — both those who were born in this country and those who settled here because, back in their birthplace, Haiti, innocent people can be killed just for cheering on the wrong team in a soccer match.

Only about a two-hour flight from U.S. shores, Haiti is one of the poorest, most dangerous places on earth. The government is in shambles, with machete-wielding, machine-gun-toting gang members taking over 80 percent of the capital, Port-au-Prince.

Fran and I first traveled to Haiti almost 30 years ago as part of a congressional delegation when I was serving on the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. We have since been there over 20 times and have supported a Catholic priest who runs a tuition-free school in a slum in Port-au-Prince.

We have always been amazed when, even in the poorest areas of Haiti, we see children coming out of homes made of rusting corrugated metal and cardboard with shoes shined and clothes neat and pressed. We know that the Haitian people want the same things we all want — a good job, the chance to get a quality education and the ability to raise a family in a safe and secure environment. Haitian migrants have gone to Springfield because of the jobs and chance for a better life there.

On Monday, I met with Springfield manufacturing business owners who employ Haitians. As one of them told me, his business would not have been able to stay open after the pandemic but for the Haitians who filled the jobs.

There have been language barriers and cultural differences, but these Haitians come to work every day, are fitting in with co-workers and have become valuable employees. As a teenager working in my parents' seed company, I worked with the guys loading seed bags onto trucks and boxcars. Their acceptance of a co-worker depended on if they thought the person was pulling his own weight. What is happening today in these companies in Springfield with the Haitian employees is no different.

At the same time, the sudden surge in population has created challenges that no city could anticipate or prepare for. The health care system, housing market and school classrooms have been strained. There is a desperate need for more Haitian Creole translators. And ensuring that Haitians learn how to drive safely and understand our driving customs and traffic laws remains a top priority.

These are the real challenges. Mayor Rob Rue; the City Council; the county commission president, Melanie Flax Wilt; and others have been working tirelessly on these issues, and we are assisting them at the state level.

Fran and I have met with so many other dedicated people in Springfield, many of them teachers or volunteers from nonprofits and the faith-based community, who are doing the Lord's work each day, teaching English to children who speak only Creole or Spanish or helping those who need health care, whether a new Haitian immigrant or someone whose family has been in Springfield for generations.

Their work will continue long after this fall's election is over and the national spotlight turns away from Springfield. But in the meantime, our people and our history deserve better than to be falsely portrayed.

This isn't just personal for a lot of us; it's about our pride in America. When one of the nation's biggest railroads built the Big Four Train Depot in Springfield, the city became a hub for passenger and express rail, with an average of 3,000 freight cars

and 40 passenger trains speeding through the city daily in the mid-1920s. Located downtown, the Depot became the perfect campaign whistle stop for politicians. In 1960, when I was 13 years old, my parents and I went to see the Republican candidate for president, Richard Nixon, when his train came through Springfield, and four years later to see Barry Goldwater as his train also stopped in the middle of Springfield as he traveled across the Midwest. They both talked about the prospects for the future.

Springfield today has a very bright future. The people who live there love their families, value education, work hard, care about one another and tackle the challenges they face head-on, just as they have done for over 200 years.

I am proud of this community, and America should be, too.

Mike DeWine, a Republican, is the governor of Ohio.

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A correction was made on Sept. 20, 2024: An earlier version of this article described the entity that built the Big Four Train Depot incorrectly. It was a single railroad — the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St Louis Railway — not four railroads.

When we learn of a mistake, we acknowledge it with a correction. If you spot an error, please let us know at nytnews@nytimes.com. [Learn more](#)

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