

Vietnam relations get mixed reviews

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Calling for an end to the discord between the United States and Vietnam, President Clinton established full diplomatic relations between both countries in a White House ceremony yesterday.

Clinton's declaration reflects his effort to improve political and economic relations with Vietnam's communist government, centered in Hanoi.

But, the speech has elicited mixed reactions from Americans and Vietnamese. For some

some Columbia residents, the declaration recalls the two countries' painful, shared past.

Cau "Calvin" Nguyen, 33, has owned downtown Columbia's Chinese Wok Express for two years. After coming to the United States with his father in 1981, they later moved to St. Louis so that Nguyen could study electrical engineering at Florissant Valley Community College.

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— **Brian Brooks,**
Vietnam veteran

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Looking back on the oppression within communist Vietnam, Nguyen remembers life in his home country as a painful time. After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, Nguyen said increased oppression forced family members to leave.

"I had to escape by going into Malaysia," Nguyen said. "My mother and three sisters are still there, and we hope to bring them to the U.S."

Normalization might make it easier for people to travel between both countries, and local political experts said

Clinton's move will immediately establish an exchange of diplomats between the countries.

"A denial of diplomatic representation is a symbol of discord in the contemporary world," said Herbert Tillema, professor of political science at M.U. Still, politicians such as U.S. Sen. Bob Smith, R-N.H., are hesitant. Smith argued

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Tuesday that the United States should not establish diplomatic ties until Hanoi accounts for the 2,200 Americans still listed as missing from Vietnam, other neighboring countries and at sea.

Smith's misgivings about Americans missing in action raises important controversies that are voiced by local Vietnam War veterans.

Brian Brooks, associate professor of journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia, was at Bien Hoa, Vietnam, with the U.S. Army's 1st Cavalry Division in 1971 and 1972.

"I think that the declaration is long overdue," Brooks said. "The idea that we'll get better accounts of people missing in action is ridiculous because it makes more sense to have diplomatic relations and work with them."

"It was a horrible war, and let's put it behind us," he said.

While easier travel and better business relations are promised by the declaration, controversies also stem from the declaration's economic aspects.

Given the possible benefits to businesses, Smith said during a Fox news broadcast Tuesday, that the declaration is being driven by business incentives.

Some local residents born in Vietnam agree.

"By setting up business investment, it will inflate prices in Vietnam, and the cost of living will increase for the locals," said Tricia Nguyen, who left Vietnam with her family in 1975, when she was 3.

However, Tillema said the declaration's business factors can't be avoided.

"It is almost never possible to make a major diplomatic move without business considerations, as well as diplomatic and strategic concerns," Tillema said, adding that Vietnam has a relatively small market.