

1 OVERSIGHT OF THE ADMINISTRATION'S FISCAL YEAR 2016
2 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM: FISCAL
3 AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

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5 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2015

6 United States Senate,
7 Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest,
8 Committee on the Judiciary,
9 Washington, D.C.

10 The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:07 p.m.,
11 in room SD-226, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jeff
12 Sessions, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

13 Present: Senators Sessions, Perdue, Grassley, Tillis,
14 Durbin, Klobuchar, Franken, and Blumenthal.

15 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JEFF SESSIONS, A U.S.

16 SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ALABAMA

17 Chairman Sessions. Thank you all for being with us. I
18 am glad Senator Durbin can be with us. He is very
19 knowledgeable in these areas.

20 We are having a vote going on now, so we were able to
21 vote early and come on by, and sorry that we did not get to
22 start right on time.

23 I would like everyone present to be able to watch the
24 hearing without obstruction. If people stand up and block
25 the views of those behind them or speak out of turn, it is

1 not fair or considerate to others, and officers will remove
2 those individuals from the room.

3 Before we begin with opening statements, I want to
4 explain how we are going to proceed. We have one panel of
5 witnesses today, Government witnesses. I will make an
6 opening statement, followed by opening statements from
7 Senators Schumer, Grassley, and Durbin. Each witness will
8 have 5 minutes for an opening statement. Following their
9 statements, we will begin the first round of questions, and
10 if each Senator wishes to continue with questions, we will
11 have a second round of questions. If there are no
12 objections, I will start with my opening statement.

13 The hearing today will focus on the administration's
14 proposed refugee settlement program for fiscal year 2016.
15 In particular, we will examine the economic and security
16 implications of the administration's plan to boost
17 significantly the admission of refugees to nearly 200,000
18 over 2 years, including a large increase in Syrian
19 resettlement.

20 Too often, discussions of any one particular
21 immigration program lack broader numerical context. Refugee
22 admissions, asylees, and parolees are all in addition to our
23 huge annual intake of 1 million green card holders each year
24 plus the 700,000 foreign workers and the 500,000 students
25 that we have.

1 So before addressing the policy question of whether or
2 not to admit additional groups of refugees, we should first
3 consider the broader immigration circumstances that we have
4 in our country.

5 This week marks the 50th anniversary of the 1965
6 Immigration and Nationality Act. Pew Research has done an
7 exhaustive study on the Act, and here are some of their
8 findings, as well as findings from the Census Bureau and the
9 DHS, the Department of Homeland Security.

10 In the last five decades, 59 million immigrants have
11 entered the United States. Immigration, including the
12 children of post-1965 immigrants, has added 72 million to
13 our population of 330 million. One-fifth of the world's
14 immigrants live in the United States. No other country has
15 taken in more than one in 20. We have taken in six times
16 more immigrants than all of Latin America and 10 million
17 more than the European, who has a more than 50 percent
18 greater population. So we have permanently resettled 1.5
19 million immigrants from Muslim countries in the United
20 States since 9/11. In 1970, fewer than one in 21 million
21 Americans were foreign born. Today it is approaching one in
22 seven and will soon eclipse the highest levels ever recorded
23 in the country.

24 Pew projects new immigrants and their children will add
25 103 million individuals. Six in ten decades of the 20th

1 century witnessed immigration declines. Every decade of the
2 21st century will see rapidly rising immigration, with each
3 decade setting new all-time records.

4 After four decades of large-scale immigration, Pew
5 polls show that by a more than 3-to-1 margin, the public
6 would like to see immigration reduced rather than increased.
7 According to Rasmussen, only 7 percent of Americans support
8 resettling 100,000 Middle Eastern refugees annually in the
9 United States.

10 And more recent studies from Georgetown Professor Eric
11 Gould and Harvard Professor George Borjas, both
12 knowledgeable experts, have linked this huge increase in the
13 foreign labor supply to the crippling wage stagnation and
14 joblessness that is affecting many of our workers.

15 So with that context in mind, we must consider what our
16 economic, social, and security infrastructure can
17 responsibly handle. Let us not also forget that we are
18 presently dealing with our own hemisphere's immigration
19 crisis. The situation in Syria and throughout the Middle
20 East is a serious one, but it cannot be solved with
21 emigrating large numbers of people from that region.

22 While the United States may have a role to play and
23 does have a role to play, such as establishing safe zones in
24 Syria as recommended by General Petraeus, it would be more
25 appropriate to effectively support the refugees in locations

1 closer to their homes with the long-term goal of being able
2 to return them safely to their homes. That is why the
3 Middle Eastern nations clearly must take a larger role and
4 the lead, actually in resettling their region's refugees.
5 It is not sound policy to respond to the myriad problems in
6 the region by encouraging millions to abandon their home.
7 Resettling the region's refugees within the region is the
8 course likeliest to produce good long-term reforms and
9 stabilization.

10 It has also been reported that as many as three of four
11 of those seeking entry into Europe are not refugees from
12 Syria but economic migrants, many from many different
13 countries. In a September 23rd Washington Post article,
14 this is what they reported: "There are well-dressed
15 Iranians speaking Farsi who insist they are members of the
16 persecuted Yazidis of Iraq. There are Indians who do not
17 speak Arabic but say they are from Damascus. There are
18 Pakistanis, Albanians, Egyptians, Kosovars, Somalis, and
19 Tunisians from countries with plenty of poverty and
20 violence, but no war. It should come as no surprise that
21 many migrants seem to be pretending they are someone else.
22 The prize, after all, is the possibility of benefits,
23 residency, and work in Europe."

24 So we will have that same problem here, and we do have
25 that problem here. We must be cautious. The administration

1 originally proposed a ceiling of 75,000 refugee admissions
2 in the next fiscal year. Last week, the administration
3 announced that it plans to accept at least a floor of 85,000
4 refugees next year and at least 100,000 the next year. Once
5 here with refugee status, those individuals can claim any
6 job and collect any Federal welfare benefit. Recent
7 statistics from the Department of Health and Human Services
8 Office of Refugee Resettlement indicate that 75 percent of
9 refugees receive food stamps and more than half receive free
10 health care and cash benefits.

11 For refugees from the Middle East, the numbers are even
12 higher. More than 90 percent of recent Middle Eastern
13 refugees draw food stamps and about 70 percent receive free
14 health care and cash welfare.

15 Refugee settlement also comes with security risks as we
16 have witnessed with the surge of ISIS recruitment among, for
17 example, Somali refugee communities in Minnesota. Anyone
18 claiming to have a serious and honest discussion of refugee
19 resettlement must ask the difficult questions about
20 integration--how can we accomplish that?--assimilation and
21 community safety. This is certainly true with respect to
22 countries like Syria where we have little or no information
23 about who the people are, no background information, no
24 ability to determine whether they are radicalized now or
25 might become radicalized after their arrival in the United

1 States.

2 Indeed, the FBI Assistant Director for Counterterrorism
3 has testified that the United States does not have "the
4 systems in place on the ground" in Syria to collect enough
5 information to properly screen refugees. That is pretty
6 obvious, frankly. Our Subcommittee is currently
7 investigating the scores of examples of refugees and asylees
8 who go on to commit acts of terror or become involved with
9 terrorist organizations.

10 The economic and physical security of the American
11 people must never be a secondary consideration. With
12 workers' pay stagnant, our entitlement programs on the verge
13 of insolvency, our law enforcement struggling to combat
14 radicalization and increasing crime, and our schools and
15 communities struggling to keep up, voters are rightly and
16 justifiably wondering about their Government's priorities
17 and how we should conduct our business. So that is what we
18 will explore today.

19 Senator Durbin, I am glad you can be with us. I know
20 you are knowledgeable on these issues, and once again I
21 would like to thank our witnesses who are involved with or
22 lead the agencies that handle these difficult issues every
23 day, and we look forward to their testimony.

24 Senator Durbin?

25 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD J. DURBIN, A U.S.

1 SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

2 Senator Durbin. Thank you very much, Chairman
3 Sessions.

4 My mother was an immigrant from Lithuania. She was
5 brought to America at the age of 2 with her brother and
6 sister. My grandmother carried them off a boat in Baltimore
7 and put them on a train to what they considered to be the
8 Promised Land--East St. Louis, Illinois. My grandmother did
9 not speak English very well, but she was determined to have
10 a better life for her children and her family. She worked
11 hard. Our whole family worked hard. And as her son, I
12 ended up with a full-time job.

13 When you reflect on my background, my family's story,
14 it is not just mine. It is America's story. It is who we
15 are. We are Nation of immigrants.

16 On the issue of refugees, there are two Members of the
17 United States Senate who are the sons of refugees. One is
18 running for President of the United States.

19 So I want to put this in context when we talk about
20 issues. We are talking about real lives and real people.
21 And today we are talking about the worst humanitarian crisis
22 of our time.

23 This refugee crisis has almost 60 million people who
24 have been forcibly displaced from their homes around the
25 world. Syria is the epicenter. When they ask me what I

1 think of when you say the two words "Vietnam War," instantly
2 my first impression is a photo image of a little girl, a
3 victim of napalm, naked, running down a road toward the
4 camera, crying, with her arms extended. What is my image of
5 Syrian refugees? A 3-year-old Syrian boy who drowned in the
6 Mediterranean--Aylan Kurdi. I looked at that little corpse
7 that had washed up on the shore and thought, "That is my
8 grandson." That is the image I take from the Syrian refugee
9 crisis.

10 More than half of Syria's 23 million people have been
11 forced from their homes. More than 4 million Syrians are
12 registered as refugees, including almost 2 million children.
13 More than 10,000 Syrian children have been killed.
14 Thousands are unaccompanied and separated from their
15 parents. They are not economic migrants. They are refugees
16 fleeing for their lives.

17 The poet Warsan Shire, who is herself a refugee from
18 Somalia, put it well when she wrote, "No one leaves home
19 unless home is the mouth of a shark. No one puts their
20 children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land."

21 The Syrian refugee crisis has placed a great strain on
22 many countries. The tiny country of Lebanon, population 4.2
23 million, now hosts 1.2 million registered Syrian refugees,
24 more refugees per capita than any country in the world.
25 That is almost 30 percent of their population. And Jordan,

1 of course, going through the same type of strain.

2 Do we have any obligation in the United States to face
3 this? I think we do. History tells us we should.

4 We have taken some positive steps to address this
5 crisis. The United States is the most generous donor to the
6 refugees of any Nation in the world. We are providing safe
7 haven to hundreds of Syrian visitors in this country who
8 were allowed to stay on a temporary basis when the war
9 developed. After last year's hearing, I held a hearing on
10 the Syrian refugee crisis. The administration issued
11 exemptions so they could stay and not return to the danger
12 of Syria. But so far, the United States of America has
13 accepted about 1,600 Syrian refugees. Sixteen hundred, a
14 small number.

15 And may I join with Senator Klobuchar and 13 other
16 Senators asking the administration to admit at least 65,000
17 by the end of 2016. The administration is now looking at
18 10,000. Why does it take so long? Because our vetting
19 process is very careful. It takes from 14 to 24 months
20 after the initial interview for a refugee to be accepted in
21 the United States. This notion--and you will hear it on the
22 campaign trail--that we just throw our doors open and say,
23 "Come on board," is not true at all. I have gone through a
24 classified briefing, and the background checks that we
25 impose on these people are very serious and very thorough,

1 and they take a long, long time.

2 Germany has announced they are taking 800,000 Syrian
3 refugees. Their average time for vetting? Four months.
4 Ours? Eighteen to 24 months. We are careful. If we are
5 going to show that we have a heart, we are also going to be
6 thoughtful about it, too, and do everything humanly possible
7 to avoid any dangerous person from ever coming to our
8 country.

9 So what is the lesson of refugees in the United States?
10 There is a lesson from World War II, isn't there? Remember
11 a ship called the "St. Louis." It came to our shores with
12 Jews from Europe. They said, "If you do not take us, we
13 will go back to Europe and die." We did not take them.
14 They returned to the Holocaust.

15 After the war, we accepted many refugees, hundreds of
16 thousands. In Vietnam, we think maybe some 400,000 ended up
17 coming to the United States. Soviet Jews who were allowed
18 to come to this country to avoid persecution, over 200,000.
19 And let me add, when it came to Cuban refugees, the numbers
20 now are about 650,000, including, as I mentioned earlier,
21 the fathers of two of our colleagues in the United States
22 Senate, one of who is running for President.

23 We resettled more than 150,000 refugees from the former
24 Yugoslavia, and the reason I want to raise that point is
25 because there is something that must be said. We are

1 talking about many Muslims who have come to the United
2 States and become an important part of our country. In my
3 condo building in Chicago, Illinois, there are two Bosnian
4 Muslims who are the hardest-working people I know, so proud
5 of their families and proud to be part of this country; and
6 as we will find here from groups that sent us statements,
7 including, in particular, a letter signed by 400 faith
8 leaders expressing strong opposition to any effort to limit
9 the resettlement of Muslim refugees.

10 Let me just close by saying on an economic basis it is
11 true. Some of these refugees come here dirt poor and need a
12 helping hand. I met four of those families just 2 weeks ago
13 in Chicago. But the statistics will also tell us that that
14 changes very, very quickly. As soon as they can command
15 enough of the English language, they are off and working,
16 and working hard at some of the toughest jobs. Some of them
17 turn out to be pretty successful: the late General John
18 Shalikashvili; Sergei Brin, the co-founder of Google; former
19 Intel CEO Andrew Grove, the pioneer of the semiconductor
20 industry; oh, and I did not mention Steve Jobs, the son of a
21 Syrian immigrant. So I would hope today that as we reflect
22 on this issue, we reflect on history.

23 The last thing I will say is I would like to introduce
24 the members of this Subcommittee to Hassam Alustrum. Mr.
25 Alustrum, are you here? Please stand. Thank you, sir. He

1 fled his home in Homs, Syria, in 2013 after his house was
2 shelled by a missile from the Syrian Army. He moved into
3 another house with five other families, and that house was
4 shelled and destroyed as well. He moved to another
5 neighborhood, but barrel bombs were being dropped in that
6 neighborhood. He then fled Syria with his wife, Suha, and
7 two children. After a long and difficult journey through
8 the desert, Mr. Alustrum ended up in Jordan where he applied
9 for refugee status. After a long process, he and his family
10 came to the United States on June 16th this year. He now
11 works two jobs. He moves furniture during the day and he is
12 a baker at night in order to support his family. Mr.
13 Alustrum is not a terrorist, and he is not a fiscal drain on
14 America. We should be proud that our country has welcomed
15 Mr. Alustrum and his family. That is what our country's
16 refugee settlement program is all about. I hope my
17 colleagues in Congress will come to understand that as a
18 result of this hearing.

19 Thank you, sir.

20 Chairman Sessions. Thank you, Senator Durbin, and
21 thank you for your guest that you introduced.

22 We are looking to establish a good, sound policy that
23 fulfills the United States' responsibility in this regard
24 and that does so in a smart and effective way.

25 Senator Grassley, did you have an opening statement?

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CHUCK GRASSLEY, A U.S.

2 SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF IOWA

3 Senator Grassley. I think because of time I will put
4 my statement in the record. But I do have a statement, and
5 I am going to put it in the record.

6 [The prepared statement of Chairman Grassley follows:]

7 / SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT

1 Senator Klobuchar. Mr. Chairman?

2 Chairman Sessions. Yes?

3 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. AMY KLOBUCHAR, A U.S.

4 SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

5 Senator Klobuchar. I am going to have to leave a
6 little early for something I committed to, but I just wanted
7 to put my statement in the record as well. And I know that
8 Senator Durbin mentioned the work that we have done to try
9 to get more Syrian refugees into our country. We have been
10 moving at a very slow pace. And just coming from a State
11 that Senator Franken and I represent, which is the home of
12 so many refugees, we are so proud of our Hmong population.
13 We took in these Hmong people who fought on our side in the
14 war in Vietnam, and now they are integrated in our community
15 and thriving. We have very strong Liberian and Somali
16 populations, and it is a major part of our State's fabric of
17 life. And I think people have to remember that when we talk
18 about this issue because, as Senator Durbin said, 90 of our
19 Fortune 500 companies were formed by immigrants, 200
20 immigrants or kids of immigrants, 30 percent of our U.S.
21 Nobel Laureates were born in other countries. So I hope we
22 think about that when we consider this refugee issue.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

24 [The prepared statement of Senator Klobuchar follows:]

25 / SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT

1 Chairman Sessions. All right. If the panel would
2 stand, raise your right hand, and take the oath. Do you
3 affirm that the testimony you are about to give before this
4 Committee will be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing
5 but the truth, so help you God?

6 Mr. Bartlett. I do.

7 Ms. Strack. I do.

8 Mr. Emrich. I do.

9 Mr. Carey. I do.

10 Chairman Sessions. Please be seated.

11 I will briefly introduce our witnesses. For reference,
12 their full biographies are available on the Committee's
13 website.

14 First we have Larry Bartlett, Director of Admissions
15 for the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the
16 Department of State. Mr. Bartlett is the Director of the
17 Refugee Admissions Office of the U.S. Department of State's
18 Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. He
19 previously served in various State Department leadership
20 positions and served in a variety of capacities with the
21 Peace Corps.

22 Next we have Ms. Barbara Strack, Chief of the Refugee
23 Affairs Division at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration
24 Service. She joined the USCIS as Chief of the Refugee
25 Affairs Division in 2005. Ms. Strack previously held

1 positions with the National Immigration Forum, the former
2 Immigration and Naturalization Service, as counsel to a U.S.
3 Senate Subcommittee, and in private practice of law in
4 Washington, D.C., at O'Melveny & Myers. She is with the
5 Department of Homeland Security.

6 Next we have Mr. Matthew Emrich, Acting Associate
7 Director of the Fraud Detection and National Security
8 Directorate at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service,
9 also with Homeland Security. Before he was selected as
10 Acting Associate Director, he served as a Deputy Associate
11 Director of FDNS and has over 21 years of immigration, law
12 enforcement, and intelligence experience. Before his
13 civilian Government employment, Mr. Emrich served for 8
14 years on active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps in the
15 counterintelligence and infantry fields. He also has worked
16 in Baghdad as a deployed senior human intelligence analyst
17 for the Multi-National Force - Iraq.

18 Finally, we have Mr. Bob Carey, Director of the Office
19 of Refugee Resettlement. Mr. Carey most recently served as
20 vice president of resettlement and migration policy at the
21 International Rescue Committee, leading the agency's
22 advocacy on refugee, immigration, and anti-trafficking, and
23 community development policy issues. He also served as
24 Chair of the Refugee Council USA.

25 So this is a good panel with much experience in lead

1 key agencies that are critical to how we handle the refugee
2 program.

3 So, Mr. Bartlett, if you would, give us your opening
4 statement.

1 STATEMENT OF LAWRENCE BARTLETT, DIRECTOR, OFFICE
2 OF REFUGEE ADMISSIONS, BUREAU OF POPULATION,
3 REFUGEES, AND MIGRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
4 WASHINGTON, D.C.

5 Mr. Bartlett. Mr. Chair, distinguished Senators, thank
6 you for holding this briefing and bringing attention to the
7 importance of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. Thank
8 you also for the opportunity to appear before you with my
9 colleagues from the Departments of Homeland Security and
10 Health and Human Services and to update you on the measures
11 we have taken to protect refugees around the world and
12 provide new homes to some of the most vulnerable.

13 According to the United Nations High Commissioner for
14 Refugees' latest statistics, there are nearly 20 million
15 refugees in the world. The vast majority of these refugees
16 will receive support in the country to which they fled until
17 they can voluntarily and safely return home. The United
18 States contributes to the programs of UNHCR, the
19 International Committee of the Red Cross, the International
20 Organization for Migration, and other international and non-
21 governmental organizations that provide protection and
22 assistance to refugees until they can return home.

23 In 2014, some 126,000 refugees voluntarily repatriated
24 to their country of origin. That is the lowest recorded
25 number since 1983. A small number of refugees may be

1 allowed to become citizens in the country to which they
2 fled, and an even smaller number--primarily those who are
3 the most vulnerable--will be resettled in a third country.
4 While UNHCR reports that less than 1 percent of all refugees
5 are eventually resettled in third countries, the United
6 States welcomes over half of these refugees.

7 Since 1975, Americans have welcomed over 3 million
8 refugees from all over the world. The United States Refugee
9 Admissions Program reflects the United States' highest
10 values and aspirations of compassion, generosity, and
11 leadership. Resettlement opportunities are focused on
12 refugees who have immediate needs for durable and lasting
13 solutions.

14 While maintaining our leadership role in humanitarian
15 protection, an integral part of this mission is to ensure
16 that refugee resettlement opportunities go only to those who
17 are eligible for such protection and who are not known to
18 present a risk to the safety and security of our country.
19 Accordingly, our program is committed to deterring and
20 detecting fraud among those seeking to resettle in the
21 United States, and applicants to our program are subject to
22 more intensive security than any other type of traveler to
23 the U.S. to protect against threats to our national
24 security. The Department of State collaborates with the
25 Department of Homeland Security on this and also

1 collaborates closely with the Centers for Disease Control
2 and Prevention to protect the health of U.S.-bound refugees
3 and the U.S. public.

4 For the past 3 fiscal years, the program has met its
5 target for refugee arrivals, an unprecedented achievement in
6 the program's history. In 2016, the program will grow to
7 serve 85,000 refugees, at least 10,000 of whom will be
8 Syrians, in order to respond to the increased needs in the
9 Middle East.

10 The program enjoys substantial support from State and
11 local governments as well as community members. The program
12 resettles refugees to 48 States, 173 cities, and 304 sites.
13 As a public-private partnership, it requires the support of
14 American non-governmental organizations, charities, faith-
15 based groups, and thousands of volunteers and supporters of
16 the program in hundreds of communities across the country.
17 Recently, the Department of State has received an outpouring
18 of interest from individuals, churches, and community
19 organizations wishing to help with Syrian refugee
20 resettlement.

21 With the continued support of Congress and the American
22 people, refugee resettlement will remain a proud tradition
23 for many years to come.

24 Thank you.

25 [The prepared statement of Mr. Bartlett follows:]

1 Chairman Sessions. Thank you very much.

2 Ms. Strack?

1 STATEMENT OF BARBARA L. STRACK, CHIEF, REFUGEE
2 AFFAIRS DIVISION, REFUGEE, ASYLUM, AND
3 INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS DIRECTORATE, U.S.
4 CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, U.S.
5 DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY, WASHINGTON, D.C.

6 Ms. Strack. Chairman Sessions, Ranking Member Durbin,
7 and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for
8 the opportunity to testify today.

9 Next month will mark the tenth anniversary of the
10 Refugee Corps, a cadre of specially trained officers at
11 USCIS who are dedicated to adjudicating applications for
12 refugee status overseas. I have been honored to serve as
13 the Chief of the Refugee Affairs Division over these 10
14 years and to work with this talented staff who are equally
15 committed to the humanitarian mission of offering
16 resettlement opportunities to refugees while safeguarding
17 the integrity of our program and our national security.

18 This program has consistently benefited from the
19 support of colleagues throughout USCIS and DHS as a whole,
20 including USCIS' Asylum Corps, international staff, and
21 Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate. As
22 reflected by this panel today, we also work closely across
23 departments.

24 The Refugee Resettlement Program has forged strong and
25 deep relationships with colleagues in the law enforcement,

1 national security, and intelligence communities, and we
2 continue to benefit enormously from their expertise,
3 analysis, and collaboration. It simply would not be
4 possible to support a resettlement program of the size and
5 scope that the U.S. maintains today without this critical
6 interagency infrastructure.

7 As you know, the United States has a proud and long
8 tradition of offering protection, freedom, and opportunity
9 to refugees from around the world who live in fear of
10 persecution and are often left to languish in difficult
11 conditions of temporary asylum. USCIS remains dedicated to
12 fulfilling this mission as an integral part of this is to
13 ensure that refugee resettlement opportunities go to those
14 who are eligible for such protection and who do not present
15 a risk to the safety and security of our country.
16 Accordingly, we are committed to deterring and detecting
17 fraud among those seeking to resettle, and we continue to
18 employ the highest security measures to protect against
19 risks to our national security.

20 My written testimony describes in detail the screening
21 measures and safeguards that have been developed by the U.S.
22 Refugee Admissions Program and enhanced over time. While
23 many of these enhancements were first deployed in connection
24 with the Iraqi Refugee Resettlement Program, they are now
25 being applied more broadly to applicants of all

1 nationalities, including Syrians, who represent a growing
2 portion of our caseload. This entails biographic and
3 biometric security checks, and a refugee applicant is not
4 approved for travel until the results of all required
5 security checks have been obtained and cleared.

6 In addition to security checks, USCIS conducts
7 individual in-person interviews with applicants to determine
8 their eligibility for refugee status. Recognizing that
9 well-trained officers play a critical role in protecting the
10 integrity of the refugee process, we place great emphasis on
11 providing the highest-quality training to our adjudicators.
12 This involves detailed training on specific refugee
13 populations, including special training on the Iraqi and
14 Syrian caseloads, in which outside experts from the
15 intelligence, policy, and academic communities participate.
16 In every instance, officers assess the credibility of
17 applicants and evaluate whether the applicant's testimony is
18 consistent with known country conditions.

19 Given the wide geographic scope of the U.S. Refugee
20 Admissions Program, including remote and sometimes difficult
21 locations, USCIS coordinates closely with PRM to schedule
22 refugee interviews every quarter of the fiscal year. In a
23 typical quarter, USCIS will deploy over 100 staff in up to
24 16 or 17 different locations. And as a result of these
25 carefully coordinated operations, as you have heard from Mr.

1 Bartlett, we have succeeded in meeting the refugee
2 admissions ceiling of 70,000 for a third year in a row.

3 Looking forward to fiscal year 2016, USCIS is prepared
4 to work closely with the State Department and other
5 interagency partners to support a Refugee Admissions Program
6 of 85,000, including at least 10,000 Syrian refugees. We
7 will continue to look for opportunity to improve and
8 streamline our operations while maintaining the integrity of
9 the program and our national security.

10 When I meet with new officers joining the Refugee
11 Corps, I talk with them about the United States'
12 longstanding tradition of offering protection to those
13 fleeing persecution. I look at our work as being the
14 stewards of this tradition for this time and this
15 generation. We are committed to meeting this responsibility
16 and preserving this American hallmark.

17 In closing, I would like to thank the Subcommittee for
18 this opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer
19 your questions.

20 [The prepared statement of Ms. Strack follows:]

1 Chairman Sessions. Thank you, Ms. Strack.
2 Mr. Emrich?

1 STATEMENT OF MATTHEW D. EMRICH, ACTING ASSOCIATE
2 DIRECTOR, FRAUD DETECTION AND NATIONAL SECURITY
3 DIRECTORATE, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION
4 SERVICES, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY,
5 WASHINGTON, D.C.

6 Mr. Emrich. Thank you, Chairman Sessions, Ranking
7 Member Durbin, and other distinguished Senators, for the
8 opportunity to update you on the measures we are taking to
9 ensure the security of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

10 In addition to the security checks that my colleagues
11 Mr. Bartlett and Ms. Strack have described and that are in
12 our written testimony that apply to all refugees regardless
13 of nationality, USCIS has begun an additional layer of
14 enhanced review of Syrian refugee applicants. This enhanced
15 review is performed by headquarters-based staff from the
16 USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate, or
17 FDNS.

18 I would like to take a moment to describe the role of
19 FDNS. Also within the D.C.-based element of the Fraud
20 Detection and National Security Directorate is the
21 Intelligence Division, which is in close and regular contact
22 with our DHS intelligence community partner, the DHS Office
23 of Intelligence and Analysis, other DHS components, and
24 intelligence community member agencies.

25 FDNS also has full-time liaison officers stationed at

1 the FBI headquarters National Joint Terrorism Task Force,
2 Interpol, and the FBI Terrorist Screening Center. We rely
3 on these everyday connections to share information with our
4 law enforcement and intelligence partners at the
5 headquarters level, both proactively and when asked, and
6 these connections also reinforce the established
7 information-sharing agreements that exist within the
8 security check rubric.

9 Before refugee applicants are scheduled for interview
10 by a USCIS refugee officer in the field, Syrian cases are
11 reviewed at CIS headquarters by a Refugee Affairs Division
12 officer. All cases that meet certain criteria are referred
13 to the FDNS headquarters-based staff that I mentioned
14 earlier for additional research and review. FDNS
15 intelligence analysts conduct open-source and classified
16 research on referred cases and synthesize an assessment for
17 use by the interviewing officer. This information provides
18 case-specific context relating to country conditions and
19 regional activity, and it is used by the interviewing
20 officer to inform lines of inquiry related to the
21 applicant's eligibility and credibility.

22 Throughout this review process of Syrian refugee
23 applicants, FDNS engages with law enforcement and
24 intelligence community members to obtain additional
25 clarifying information, to assist in identity verification,

1 or to deconflict to ensure USCIS activities will not
2 adversely affect ongoing law enforcement investigations.
3 When FDNS identifies terrorism-related information, it
4 nominates an individual or individuals to the terrorism
5 watchlist using standard interagency protocols or provides
6 additional information to our existing records.
7 Additionally, FDNS intelligence analysts draft reports that
8 alert U.S. law enforcement agencies and the intelligence
9 community of information that meets standing intelligence
10 requirements.

11 We work very closely with the DHS Office of
12 Intelligence Analysis and our many law enforcement and
13 intelligence community partners to identify options for new
14 potential screening opportunities to enhance the existing
15 process. We are doing this constantly.

16 In addition to the checks that I have described,
17 refugee applicants who travel to the United States are
18 screened at the port of entry, as is the case with all
19 individuals who travel to the United States. The screening
20 at the port of entry is conducted by Customs and Border
21 Protection and the Transportation Security Administration.

22 The humanitarian crisis in the Middle East is severe,
23 and my staff and I are reminded on almost a daily basis of
24 the strife and atrocities that have been occurring in this
25 area--that have been occurring for some time and that are

1 occurring now. We are committed to maintaining and always
2 seeking to enhance a thorough screening effort in close
3 coordination with our partners so that we may maintain the
4 integrity of the program and our national security.

5 I look forward to your questions.

6 [The prepared statement of Mr. Emrich follows:]

1 Chairman Session. Thank you.

2 Mr. Carey?

1 STATEMENT OF ROBERT CAREY, DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF
2 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
3 AND HUMAN SERVICES, WASHINGTON, D.C.

4 Mr. Carey. Chairman Sessions and distinguished members
5 of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify on
6 the Department of Health and Human Services'
7 responsibilities in facilitating the resettlement of
8 refugees in the United States. In my testimony today, I
9 will describe the role that HHS plays in the Refugee
10 Resettlement Program.

11 The Refugee Act of 1980 established the Office of
12 Refugee Resettlement within HHS and outlined the United
13 States' commitment to humanitarian relief through the
14 resettlement of persons fleeing persecution on the basis of
15 their race, religion, nationality, membership in a social
16 group, or political opinion.

17 Since the passage of the Act, over 3 million refugees
18 from more than 70 countries have been provided safe haven in
19 the United States, along with the possibility of a new
20 beginning and freedom from persecution and displacement.

21 The Departments of Homeland Security, State, and HHS
22 work together to advance America's humanitarian response to
23 refugees through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

24 In fiscal year 2014, nearly 140,000 individuals were
25 eligible for resettlement services through ORR programs.

1 These programs assist refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian
2 entrants, victims of torture, foreign-born victims of human
3 trafficking, and special immigrant visa holders to become
4 employed and self-sufficient as soon as possible after their
5 arrival.

6 ORR carries out its mission to serve refugees through
7 grants and services, administered by State governments and
8 nonprofit organizations and an extensive public-private
9 partnership network. ORR grants are designed to facilitate
10 refugees' successful transition and integration into life in
11 the United States. Refugees arrive with distinct skills and
12 experiences, and we strive to provide the benefits and
13 services necessary to leverage those assets and talents.

14 ORR funds transitional, time-limited support for
15 medical services for individuals not eligible for other
16 public benefits. Through programs administered by States
17 and nonprofit organizations, ORR provides cash and medical
18 assistance to eligible populations for up to 8 months after
19 their arrival in the U.S. In addition, ORR funds foster
20 care programs for unaccompanied refugee minors, certain
21 minors granted special immigrant juvenile status, and
22 unaccompanied minor victims of a severe form of human
23 trafficking.

24 ORR provides funds to State governments and private
25 nonprofit agencies to support social services, including

1 English language instruction, employment services, case
2 management, social adjustment services, and interpreter
3 services. These funds are allocated to States based on a
4 formula tied to the prior 2 years of arrival data which
5 accounts for refugees' and other entrants' movements to
6 other States after their initial resettlement as well.

7 ORR programs also support economic development
8 activities. These focus on financial literacy, establishing
9 credit, and matched savings in support of business starts,
10 educational goals, car purchases essential to employment,
11 and business startups that in turn employ thousands of
12 individuals.

13 A portion of new entrants participate in the voluntary
14 agency Matching Grant Program rather than the Refugee Cash
15 Assistance Program. Through this program, voluntary
16 resettlement agencies provide services to help refugees
17 become employed and self-sufficient within their first 4
18 months in the U.S. In fiscal year 2014, the program served
19 30,000 individuals and reported economic self-sufficiency
20 rates of 76 percent for refugees at 180 days after arrival.
21 Given the proven success of the program, the President's
22 budget proposed a \$22 million increase to the 2016 Matching
23 Grant Program to serve an additional 10,000 individuals.

24 Finally, I would like to share with you the story of
25 one refugee. Rikan, 28, and his family were forced to flee

1 their homeland in northern Iraq when the U.S. military began
2 its withdrawal due to family members' employment with
3 American forces and related threats to their lives.
4 Starting over was a challenge for Rikan, as it is for all
5 refugees. He applied for more than 100 jobs during his
6 first 7 months in St. Louis while attending English language
7 classes. His first job in the U.S. was working at a local
8 grocery store. Three years later, he has opened a car
9 dealership. His mission is to provide fellow immigrants
10 with affordable and reliable used cars. The business has
11 been open for 2 years. He employs a number of other
12 individuals, and he now is helping other refugees and
13 individuals from communities to buy their first cars. His
14 determination to succeed is representative of the
15 determination I see in so many of the refugees who arrive in
16 our country. Despite unimaginable hardships, violence, and
17 oppression, they arrive seeking opportunity, not handouts,
18 an opportunity to give back to their communities, achieve
19 the American dream. HHS' programs assist refugees and other
20 vulnerable populations to do just that.

21 I welcome your interest in the U.S. Refugee
22 Resettlement Program at HHS. Thank you for the opportunity
23 to discuss our work, and I would be happy to answer any
24 questions.

25 [The prepared statement of Mr. Carey follows:]

1 Chairman Sessions. Thank you, Mr. Carey.

2 You mentioned refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian
3 special programs that are also akin to refugees, and that
4 totals 140,000 that you have responsibility for?

5 Mr. Carey. Yes, sir.

6 Chairman Sessions. And that includes 85,000 refugees?

7 Mr. Carey. These numbers are from 2014. In the
8 current year, they include responsibility for 70,000
9 refugees.

10 Chairman Sessions. And so about an equal number more
11 than that. You also mentioned self-sufficiency. You define
12 self-sufficiency to include Government assistance reports,
13 do you not?

14 Mr. Carey. The Matching Grant self-sufficiency rates
15 include individuals who are employed in full-time employment
16 at 180 days after arrival.

17 Chairman Sessions. But they still may be eligible for
18 food stamps, Medicaid, and other assistance programs. Isn't
19 that correct?

20 Mr. Carey. Refugees are admitted as legal permanent
21 residents, and they are eligible for any benefits--or they
22 adjust to legal permanent resident status after 1 year. But
23 during their time of assistance, they are eligible as other
24 individuals would be during their first 8 months in the
25 United States.

1 Chairman Sessions. Well, I am just trying to clarify
2 this because I think we all need to fully understand it. As
3 I understand it, from 2008 through 2013, refugees from the
4 Middle East, for example, 91 percent are eligible and
5 receive SNAP, food stamp benefits, and high percentages
6 receive cash benefits, TANF, housing benefits, and Medicaid.
7 Is that correct?

8 Mr. Carey. I believe--

9 Chairman Sessions. Do you deny those statistics? They
10 are Government statistics.

11 Mr. Carey. Those figures include refugees who are
12 receiving benefits during their initial resettlement period
13 as provided through ORR and States and local governments.

14 Chairman Sessions. Well, my understanding is that
15 through that 5-year period, which is a long period, you had
16 a very high subsidy rate, and I just think we should know
17 that, because when they come in, you provide assistance to
18 help them get established, but they are immediately then
19 eligible for the same aid programs that we provide American
20 citizens, and that most of them will be starting at lower
21 incomes and become eligible for health care and other
22 benefits.

23 Mr. Bartlett, in general, you know, it is important for
24 us--I tried to ask my staff to make sure how does this thing
25 really work. Maybe you would be the one to ask. Refugees

1 typically go, I understand, about 90 percent to the UN, who
2 then give them some sort of number and send them, at least
3 some of them, to the United States nine resettlement offices
4 around the globe. Is that right?

5 Mr. Bartlett. Mr. Chairman, let me explain. First of
6 all, UNHCR, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, is our
7 largest partner overseas. We provide substantial funding to
8 that agency, and I think as you and others have mentioned,
9 it is important that we assist refugees overseas. It is not
10 just about bringing them here. It is about helping them,
11 and helping them to have an opportunity to go home should
12 that occasion present itself. So we do work heavily through
13 UNHCR. They have offices in all refugee-hosting countries
14 around the world, and so they are our primary partner.

15 If I could, one of the things I would like to say in
16 response to helping people overseas, the U.S. Government has
17 provided \$4.5 billion since the beginning of the Syria
18 crisis to do just that, to help refugees, number one,
19 survive--

20 Chairman Sessions. Does some of that count the UN
21 money?

22 Mr. Bartlett. Absolutely.

23 Chairman Sessions. In addition to the UN--

24 Mr. Bartlett. No, it goes primarily to the UN,
25 International Committee of the Red Cross, International

1 Organization for Migration, and then a host of NGOs that are
2 operational. We work through those partners because they
3 are the ones who actually know how to do the jobs.

4 Chairman Sessions. And we are the largest contributor
5 to that program?

6 Mr. Bartlett. That is correct. And it is with the
7 intent that people, number one, want to go home, which they
8 do, and that they will be able to do so. But there does
9 come a point in time where the strain on the hosting
10 countries--Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon obviously the big three--
11 becomes immense, and we want to do our partner also through
12 resettlement.

13 So at that point in time, the UNHCR, because they have
14 field-level people working in camps or working in urban
15 areas where they have NGOs who are doing that, identifies
16 specific people, specific families who they consider most
17 vulnerable. So we are looking--

18 Chairman Sessions. Well, I was just trying to get an
19 overview of it.

20 Mr. Bartlett. Okay.

21 Chairman Sessions. So the UN would send it to your
22 people. You would then evaluate them or at least take
23 information from them. Then it goes to Homeland Security,
24 who does background checks and personal interviews. Is that
25 correct?

1 Ms. Strack. Yes, sir, that is correct.

2 Chairman Sessions. My time is almost up. I do not
3 want to keep my colleagues waiting, but that is basically
4 right. And then there are checked indices which are
5 virtually non-existent. Mr. Emrich, I know you have got a
6 good plan there, but there is no place to check. There is
7 not anybody, as we will establish later. And then if they
8 are approved, airfare is provided to the United States.

9 Mr. Bartlett. Sir, if I could just say, not only do
10 they have to go through security checks but also through
11 medical exams, and we do that in part for the health of the
12 refugee but also the health of the United States to make
13 sure we are not importing contagious diseases. And the
14 airfare, frankly, is provided as a loan to the refugee, and
15 the refugee, once they arrive, signs a promissory note to
16 pay back the loan. And over the course of about 10 years,
17 we have an 80-percent repayment rate, and that money goes
18 back into future refugee programs.

19 Chairman Sessions. So thank you. Colleagues, we will
20 go to the next questions. And, Mr. Carey, we do not want
21 to--we just need to be aware that when we talk about the
22 cost of the program--and we have a \$1 billion cost,
23 colleagues, we are not talking about the new stress on
24 Medicaid, food stamps, schools, hospitals, the housing
25 allowances that they may be entitled to, and other costs of

1 that kind. That has not been provided. Isn't that correct?

2 You are not estimating that, Mr. Carey?

3 Mr. Carey. ORR's budget for assistance to refugees
4 during fiscal year 2015 is \$585 million. After 1 years,
5 refugees adjust to permanent resident status, and they are
6 then eligible for services on a means-tested basis in the
7 communities in which they are resettled.

8 Chairman Sessions. Actually, they are eligible for
9 those immediately, are they not? Or do they have to wait a
10 year before they become eligible for food stamps or
11 Medicaid?

12 Mr. Carey. They are eligible for services for 8 months
13 under the ORR program, and then they are eligible as any
14 other resident, legal resident would be.

15 Chairman Sessions. Thank you.

16 Senator Tillis?

17 Senator Tillis. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for holding this
18 important meeting. Thank you all for being here, and thank
19 you for your service, past and present.

20 I want to go back to trying to understand whether or
21 not we have the resources and the coordination that is
22 necessary to do this safely. But before I do, I cannot help
23 but point out that a lot of this crisis is created, if we
24 talk about the Syrian situation--but we are talking about
25 far beyond that; this is 10,000 Syrian refugees. But in the

1 case of Syria, it is because we have a despotic regime in
2 the way of Bashar al-Assad, and I think a policy there that
3 has finally led the Syrian people to believe they simply
4 cannot live with any sense of comfort and safety in this
5 country. It is a humanitarian disaster that is already
6 playing out in the hundreds of thousands. If you go to
7 Jordan and see the second largest city there now, it is a
8 refugee camp with a number of Syrians in it. If you take a
9 look at what the EU is doing, this is a crisis, and I think
10 in some part it is a crisis because of failed policies that
11 the United States has in the region trying to stabilize it.

12 Now, Secretary Kerry said that we were going to
13 increase the number of refugees from 70,000 in fiscal year
14 2015 to 75,000. And then a couple of weeks later, he said
15 that that number may be 85,000--it could go as high as
16 100,000--and that he was more or less setting a floor of
17 10,000 for the Syrians in particular. But we know that this
18 discussion is about a larger number, somewhere between, let
19 us say, 85,000 and 100,000. I am trying to get the math to
20 work.

21 I do not think any of you have been told that your
22 resources are being increased proportionate to the number of
23 refugees that you are going to have to work on, whether it
24 is the Department of State, the Department of Homeland
25 Security, or the Department of Health and Human Services.

1 So at the most fundamental level, I am trying to figure
2 out how you absorb this within the current rate of funding
3 that you have without something giving, and one of those
4 things that may give could be the very important thing that
5 we all have an obligation to ensure, and that is the safety
6 and security of the homeland. There is a lot of vetting
7 that has to occur. There is going to be handoff between the
8 various agencies. How do we make sure with this increased
9 workload and increased pressure to help the refugees that we
10 do not make a mistake that could potentially put our
11 homeland at risk? And I will start with anyone in the
12 agency glad to go first, maybe Homeland Security.

13 Mr. Bartlett. I was going to start with the numbers,
14 because that is perhaps the easier part of the question, and
15 then we will go to the security vetting. But just to be
16 clear, yes, our goal, our target, our ceiling, whichever you
17 want to call it, for this fiscal year, the one we just
18 started, is 85,000. Within that 85,000, we are striving to
19 admit 10,000 Syrians. That is not a cap.

20 Senator Tillis. Mr. Bartlett, the only clarification I
21 have is that Secretary Kerry said that it is a ceiling--it
22 is not a ceiling; it is a floor. So that suggests to me
23 language that could anticipate more over time.

24 Mr. Bartlett. The President signed a determination
25 earlier this week for 85,000. I think if that were to be

1 raised, that would again need to be re-signed at a higher
2 number. And then the 100,000 refers to the aspiration, the
3 goal to do 100,000 refugees in fiscal year 2017.

4 But I would say on the State Department side, in terms
5 of resources, we know that it will take more to bring in
6 85,000 refugees. We are looking across our programs to see
7 where we can gain efficiencies. I can assure you on our
8 side there will be no shortcuts on security; there will be
9 no shortcuts on medical screening; there will be no
10 shortcuts on processing. So we will be having discussions
11 about budgetary needs in the future, but at the moment in
12 time, there will be no shortcuts in terms of our
13 responsibilities to the American people.

14 Senator Tillis. Ms. Strack?

15 Ms. Strack. Thank you. At a planning level, we had
16 anticipated that the refugee ceiling for fiscal year 2016
17 was likely going to rise to 75,000. So as an operational
18 person and for planning purposes, I had anticipated an
19 increase from 70,000 to 75,000.

20 You are probably aware we at USCIS are in an unusual
21 situation in that we are fee-funded agency. So the money
22 that supports my program, the resources that support my
23 program, are paid by applicants for other immigration
24 benefits. So everyone who applies for a green card or
25 applies for naturalization, a piece of that fee supports the

1 refugee and asylum programs at USCIS.

2 Having spoken to our Office of Chief Financial Officer,
3 he has informed us that there is sufficient funding in what
4 is called our "examination fee account" to cover the 85,000
5 anticipated admissions in fiscal year 2016 by reprioritizing
6 between programs. But I would like to reiterate, as Mr.
7 Bartlett said, in no way are we cutting any corners or are
8 we changing the security checks or cutting back on the
9 elements that we think are integral to the integrity of the
10 program.

11 Mr. Emrich. I would just like to echo what Mr.
12 Bartlett and Ms. Strack have said regarding the security
13 checks. We will not cut corners. The security check
14 requirements were developed in the interagency with the
15 consultation and expertise of the FBI, our DHS partners, and
16 the intelligence community partners, and the security regime
17 was set up with all that input, and I have heard no
18 discussion of making any cuts to it for any reason.

19 I would like to point out that the grants of refugee
20 status are discretionary so that if there is a doubt, the
21 case is referred for further review. And if there is a
22 national security concern, that individual's application is
23 denied.

24 Mr. Carey. As the refugee situation continues to
25 evolve, the administration is assessing ORR's capacity and

1 resource needs for fiscal year 2016. With an increased
2 number of refugees, it will be important to preserve
3 currently available resources and fund this account at a
4 sufficient level.

5 Senator Tillis. Mr. Chair, if I may just ask one
6 question related to accountability. Mr. Bartlett, I
7 understand that you are working with the decisions that have
8 been made, but it does seem to me that if we went from
9 75,000 to 85,000 over a couple of weeks, given the growing
10 crisis, a serious crisis where people's lives are at stake,
11 that it is going to go up again, we can not only answer this
12 question in the context of the current commitment we have
13 made but the likely commitment we will make going forward.
14 And I share some of the Chair's concerns about the ongoing
15 costs, but more than anything else, before this Committee, I
16 have had to have the sad discussion about an immigration
17 decision that led to a young man that murdered people in my
18 city of Charlotte because the handoff was not done properly.
19 It was someone who was granted deferred status. It is not
20 specific to this, but it speaks to the various agencies
21 working together using the data effectively. In this case,
22 it resulted in the deaths of people in my home city just 20
23 minutes from where I live.

24 So I would like to now that as you move forward and you
25 all have individual pieces, you are passing the baton in

1 many cases, who ultimately owns the responsibility as we go
2 through and process 85,000 or 100,000 or 120,000? What
3 agency or who ultimately owns the responsibility if we have
4 to come back and there is a lapse?

5 And, Mr. Chair, that is my final question. Thank you
6 for your indulgence.

7 Ms. Strack. The responsibility for actually
8 adjudicating a refugee petition, it is one of our forms, the
9 Form I-590, that responsibility falls to USCIS. So we
10 approve that. We would not approve it if we have derogatory
11 information on that application, and as Mr. Emrich
12 mentioned, we also have discretion so we can deny a case
13 when we feel that is appropriate, even if there is not a
14 derogatory security check but there is other information
15 that we think makes that individual not a good candidate to
16 come to the United States.

17 There is another check. When the applicant arrives at
18 the airport, our colleagues at Custom and Border Protection,
19 the inspectors at the airport can also make a decision at
20 that point whether to admit based on the fact that the
21 applicant already has an approved refugee status.

22 Mr. Bartlett. Senator, if I could just say one thing
23 about the build from 75,000 to 85,000, this program is
24 certainly not linear. We have been planning for 75,000; now
25 we are planning for 85,000. So we will be building the

1 program throughout the year so that arrivals will be peaking
2 towards the end of the fiscal year, not at the beginning.
3 So we will have an opportunity to review how we do this to
4 make it more efficient and as effective or perhaps more
5 effective than it is now.

6 Chairman Sessions. Thank you, Senator.

7 You make a very valid point. I do not see--and if we
8 go to 100,000, that is going to--the next year, as proposed,
9 and Senator Kerry, Secretary Kerry, our former colleague,
10 told us in consultation with the Judiciary Committee last
11 week that it would be substantially increased over the
12 85,000, he thought. He frankly told us that.

13 So this is not the bottom numbers, and the problems we
14 are facing from security is here now. This is not just
15 scare tactics. I am reading a Minneapolis paper
16 interviewing a coach with a lot of kids playing ball. The
17 coach is Ahmed Ismail. He says, "There are monsters out
18 there." And it goes on to say, "More than 20 young men left
19 this Somali immigrant community from 2007 to 2009 to join
20 Al-Shabaab, Arabic for 'The Youth,' an al Qaeda affiliate
21 operating in the war-torn land their parents fled. In the
22 past year, disappearances began again, this time to the
23 Islamic State terrorists fighting in Iraq and Syria."

24 So I am just saying we need to be--we know this is
25 serious. Mr. Emrich and Ms. Strack, you do not have the

1 ability to do efficient checks on these, as we will talk
2 about later.

3 Senator Perdue, thank you for being with us, and thank
4 you for giving me this moment to make that point.

5 Senator Perdue. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I
6 will be brief. I really appreciate you calling this
7 hearing. I know that Congress has a responsibility, and the
8 President does as well, that we review this every year. And
9 yet I was chagrined to learn that we have not done it since
10 1979, so thank you for doing this. And I thank the
11 witnesses for being here today.

12 I just have a couple quick questions. Mr. Emrich, we
13 have a perfect case study here in Iraq where there were
14 systemic problems in the screening of Iraqi refugee
15 applicants here. At a recent hearing, the FBI Assistant
16 Director Michael Steinbach told House Homeland Security, and
17 I am quoting this, the administration has "learned its
18 lesson" since the problems it had with the Iraqi refugee
19 admissions effort. Can you tell us what specific measures
20 in your agency have been taken to remedy the problems? And
21 what do we learn from that exercise that we can apply here?

22 Mr. Emrich. Absolutely. Let me just briefly describe
23 the nature of the checks we do now and how they have
24 changed. The checks are multilayered. They involve both
25 biographic information and not just one data element but

1 multiple biographic data elements and fingerprints, so
2 biometric data.

3 The checks are done not just at one time. They are
4 done over a period of time, and in some cases continuously
5 throughout the process.

6 They touch against a broad range of U.S. Government
7 holdings, so our biometric check, our fingerprint check
8 checks against FBI fingerprint holdings. It checks against
9 DOD fingerprint holdings, which include fingerprints that
10 have been obtained overseas. And it also checks against the
11 DHS fingerprint system, which contains records of any time
12 someone has passed through a U.S. border, their fingerprints
13 are captured, and they go into the DHS system.

14 Senator Perdue. Can I interrupt you? I am sorry to do
15 this because I want to hear the rest of this. But in Iraq,
16 we also had background checks and actually talked to people
17 on the ground in Iraq when we had a lot of troops on the
18 ground and a lot of people in Iraq. We do not have that in
19 Syria. So is that not going to create a tremendous
20 shortfall in data in addition to the technical checks you
21 are talking about?

22 Mr. Emrich. So we have added a specific interagency
23 check since the time that we were in Iraq, and we can brief
24 you on that in detail in another setting. But another
25 additional thing that we have done for this population is

1 the enhanced review that I described. The individual comes
2 in contact first--the refugee applicant comes in contact
3 with UNHCR. He provides a story, and at that time all of
4 his family members and the applicant--I am saying "he." It
5 could be a "she." The principal applicant is registered as
6 do the family members. Then that individual is interviewed
7 again at the RSC. So by the time our folks are reviewing
8 the application, they have already been talked to twice.
9 They have had a very good incentive to provide accurate
10 information to the UNHCR because that is how--at that
11 registration, that is how they get food rations and housing
12 for the most part.

13 So I do not want to discount the importance of the
14 interview here because this is the face-to-face encounter
15 where the refugee officers have been specially trained in
16 the country and country conditions. They know what
17 questions to ask an individual who is leaving Syria. They
18 know what questions to ask about military service, what
19 questions to ask about possible bars. And if there are
20 national security concerns there, we look at the consistency
21 of all those encounters, and that gives us an opportunity to
22 ask additional questions. So we have individuals with a lot
23 of expertise who can inform questions there.

24 Senator Perdue. Okay. Thank you. I need to go on to
25 this last question. If there is any other major point you

1 want to make on that? Okay. Thank you.

2 Mr. Bartlett, I apologize. I am about out of time, but
3 I just want to get back to one thing, and that is, the
4 definition of a refugee. If someone leaves Syria--and,
5 look, we know there is a major humanitarian crisis there.
6 We know that. We have been talking in the Senate about the
7 causes of that. But what I would like to do now is if
8 someone leaves Syria and they go to Turkey and they live
9 there a year and all of a sudden they do not like where they
10 are in Turkey and they apply to the U.S., are they by
11 definition considered a refugee, a Syrian refugee, for U.S.
12 consideration in our process?

13 Mr. Bartlett. I think I have to defer to DHS, because
14 they make the final determination.

15 Ms. Strack. The definition of a refugee is contained
16 in the Refugee Convention--

17 Senator Perdue. I understand.

18 Ms. Strack. --and U.S. law very closely tracks that.
19 So basically looking at whether a person has separate past
20 persecution or has a well-founded fear of prosecution on
21 account of one of the protected grounds, which is race,
22 religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a
23 particular social group. However, there is a bar under U.S.
24 law to resettlement if an individual has been firmly
25 resettled in another country. There is quite a bit of law

1 around what it means to be firmly resettled. If you are
2 living in precarious circumstances, if you are not able to
3 work, if your children cannot go to school, you know, if you
4 are in a tenuous circumstance, that does not amount to firm
5 resettlement even if you have been in a country for a long
6 period of time. So it is a fact-specific circumstance. A
7 short way of thinking about it is if you have the set of
8 sort of rights that were similar to what a green card holder
9 would have in the United States, that you can live and work
10 indefinitely, that starts looking like firm resettlement.
11 So we would investigate that on an individual basis and look
12 at what the laws are in the country of first asylum.

13 Senator Perdue. One last quick question, and I
14 apologize, Mr. Chairman. But of all the refugee
15 applications, how many are accepted versus rejected would
16 you say in a given year, a percentage?

17 Ms. Strack. Worldwide, our average approval rate is
18 about 80 percent. Right now it is higher than that for
19 Syrian applicants, but it is likely to come down. Right now
20 it is running a little over 90 percent for Syrian
21 applicants. But that percentage is based on all the cases
22 that have been decided yes and no. What it leaves out is
23 cases that are still under review or still on hold. We
24 think a number of those hold cases, when they are finally
25 decided, are going to turn into denials. So when we have a

1 little more experience with the caseload, we expect that the
2 rate will come down somewhat.

3 Senator Perdue. Thank you very much.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Chairman Sessions. Well, thank you. This is very
6 important. I read in my opening statement what the
7 Europeans were finding, where you had the nice-dressed
8 Iranian speaking Farsi saying he is from Iraq, Indians who
9 do not speak Arabic but say they are from Damascus,
10 Pakistanis, Albanians, Egyptians, Kosovars, Somalis,
11 Tunisians who apparently are trying to get in as Syrian
12 refugees. And we are now approving 90 percent of those who
13 apply.

14 Here in the Washington Post article also, it goes on to
15 say--it had one story, there are "shady characters" in the
16 group, too, "admitted criminals, Islamic State sympathizers
17 and a couple of guys from Fallujah"--Iraq--"one with a fresh
18 bullet wound, who when asked his occupation seemed
19 confused."

20 "'Army,' said one. His friend corrected him. 'We are
21 all drivers.'"

22 "The refugees report that a forged Syrian passport can
23 be bought on the Turkish border for as little as \$200. A
24 reporter from the Daily Mail bought a Syrian passport, ID
25 card, and driver's license for \$2,000 in Turkey under the

1 name of a real man who was killed in the conflict."

2 So you face, Ms. Strack, a difficult problem. Mr.
3 Polinkus, the former head of the Association of CIS
4 Officers, has told us that the agency has become a rubber
5 stamp, that there is no way they have the ability to do what
6 is asked of them.

7 Mr. Emrich, I know you say you have not changed any of
8 your procedures, but the procedures just are not going to do
9 the job, and let us talk about that, honestly about it. The
10 Director of National Intelligence, Mr. Clapper, recently
11 stated, "'We do not put it past the likes of ISIL to
12 infiltrate operatives among these refugees.' He further
13 stated, 'It is a huge concern of ours.'"

14 Do you think that he is correct, Ms. Strack? Do you
15 disagree with that?

16 Ms. Strack. I guess I would like to talk to you about
17 what our process is. I guess--

18 Chairman Sessions. No, I am just asking, are you
19 concerned? He said, "We do not put it past...ISIL to
20 infiltrate operatives in those refugees....It is a huge
21 concern for us."

22 Now, you and Mr. Emrich are supposed to be evaluating
23 these people. Is it a concern for you? Do you think that
24 is a danger?

25 Ms. Strack. Yes, sir, that is a concern for us, and I

1 think that is what informs--that is the background that is
2 the relationship we have with the intel community, so they
3 share information with us about what they see as risks, and
4 what we have been describing to you is the methods and the
5 procedures that we have to try to mitigate those risks.

6 Could I just speak briefly to the document issue?

7 Chairman Sessions. Okay.

8 Ms. Strack. And I know Larry wanted to discuss this as
9 well. We think there is a difference between--we are not
10 working in Europe. We are not resettling refugee
11 applications out of Europe. We are working primarily in
12 Jordan and Turkey. So I think the incentives for other
13 nationalities, for non-Syrians, is different in those
14 countries of first asylum, as a first piece.

15 The second piece is I did want to say we do not rely on
16 any single document. In general, worldwide we see quite a
17 difference between refugee populations, some of which are
18 very highly documented, and some of which, because of the
19 nature of their refugee experience, do not have a lot of
20 documents.

21 We think documents are informative. We look at them.
22 But no single document is taken as a gold ticket for refugee
23 approval.

24 Chairman Sessions. Well, I am sure that is true. We
25 also are told there are--European officials stated not long

1 ago that a million are in North Africa waiting to cross the
2 Mediterranean. So there are a lot of people that would like
3 to become a refugee to the United States or Europe, and you
4 have to sort through them. And what if they do not have any
5 documents? A lot of people do not have any documents. What
6 do you refer to then?

7 Ms. Strack. In general, again, as I mentioned, we have
8 found with Syrian refugees--and I would say the same thing
9 is true with Iraqi refugees. In general, they have many,
10 many documents. But what we do is it is the process that I
11 think Mr. Emrich described, and it is also our training. We
12 involve the law enforcement community, the intelligence
13 community. We invite them in to train our refugee officers
14 and to talk to them about country conditions information.
15 So if someone does not have documents, for example, they
16 might tell us, "My documents were destroyed when a barrel
17 bomb fell on my house." We will ask when and where that
18 happened, and then we can check with intelligence community
19 or often even open-source information to find out if that is
20 realistic. Was that happening at that place at that time?

21 So we have a multifaceted approach to this. We have
22 actually reduced the number of interviews we ask our
23 officers to do of Syrian cases because we recognize that
24 they are so complex and we want the officers to be able to
25 explore all of that information, often informed by the up-

1 front individualized research that Mr. Emrich has described.
2 And if there are issues, we can come back--

3 Chairman Sessions. Well, I am not doubting your
4 dedication to try to do right with the ability that you
5 have. But on February 11th, before the House Committee on
6 Homeland Security, FBI Assistant Director Michael Steinbach
7 expressed significant concerns with screening Syrian
8 refugees. I do not see how this can be denied. I do not
9 see how you can gloss over this. He says, "The concern is
10 Syria is that we do not have systems in places on the ground
11 to collect information to vet." That would be the concern,
12 is we would be vetting databases that do not hold
13 information on those individuals, and that is a concern.

14 He went on to say, "You are talking about a country
15 that is a failed state, that is, does not have any
16 infrastructure, so to speak."

17 So all of the data sets, the police, the intel
18 services, that normally you would go to to seek information
19 do not exist.

20 Now, Mr. Emrich, you query these systems. Is that your
21 responsibility? Just yes or no. Do you supervise making
22 the inquiries?

23 Mr. Emrich. I do.

24 Chairman Sessions. And if there is no database to
25 query, then how can you have valid information?

1 Mr. Emrich. There is data that we check against, and
2 we would be happy to describe this to you in a different
3 setting.

4 Chairman Sessions. Well, you just tell us under oath.
5 You are a public official. Do you think there is adequate
6 data, when you query these databases, are you likely to have
7 any valuable information from them?

8 Mr. Emrich. I will tell you that we often find
9 valuable information and that we check every single thing
10 that is available to us.

11 Chairman Sessions. I am sure you check everything that
12 is available. But Mr. Steinbach I think is making the plain
13 fact that there are no real databases in Syria to check.
14 Isn't that right?

15 Mr. Emrich. We check everything that we are aware of
16 within U.S. Government holdings. We are either inquiring
17 about looking into or we currently check. So as far as I am
18 concerned, if we have not overturned every stone, we are in
19 the process of overturning every stone.

20 Chairman Sessions. Well, there you go again. We are
21 turning over everything that we can overturn. I do not deny
22 that. American police officers check the National Crime
23 Information Center on everybody they arrest. But they do
24 not have a National Crime Information Center. You do not
25 have access to their criminal history records. Those are

1 in, I guess, Assad's control. They do not have a computer
2 database that you can access. And so isn't Mr. Steinbach
3 telling the truth? Do you disagree with what I read from
4 him that the things that you would normally check just do
5 not exist?

6 Mr. Emrich. I would point out that in many countries
7 of the world from which we have traditionally accepted
8 refugees over the years, the United States Government did
9 not have extensive data holdings.

10 Chairman Sessions. All right. Mr. Franken, I am sorry
11 to run over. Thank you. Not too badly.

12 Senator Franken. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Anytime.

13 Ms. Strack, in prior years we have admitted far more
14 refugees than we currently do. In 1980, we admitted about
15 200,000 refugees. In the early 1990s, we admitted over
16 100,000 per year. Last year, in the midst of a humanitarian
17 crisis, we admitted fewer than 70,000.

18 So it seems to me that the numbers we are bringing in
19 today are pretty modest by comparison. It also seems to me
20 that our past experience has demonstrated that we can
21 resettle refugees in a manner that is consistent with our
22 national security.

23 Ms. Strack, what do you draw from our past experiences
24 in admitting refugees? And can you describe the measures in
25 place that ensure that those admitted to the United States

1 will contribute positively to our society?

2 Ms. Strack. Senator, I think there may be several of
3 us on the panel who would like to speak to your question. I
4 think it is important to remember in the immediate aftermath
5 of the September 11 attacks, there was a pause in refugee
6 resettlement, and it was a desire to make sure that the best
7 screening available was in place in the wake of that
8 situation. So for 2 years, the United States Refugee
9 Resettlement Program had very, very low numbers, that I
10 would say those of us who work in this field for a living
11 consider disappointingly low numbers, but it was necessary
12 at the time to make sure that those appropriate safeguards
13 were in place.

14 I think having those safeguards in place, we have
15 worked very diligently on an interagency basis, and, again,
16 with strong relationships with law enforcement, national
17 security, and intelligence community so that we are able to
18 have the program grow in a way that we think is responsible,
19 it has integrity, and it is consistent with our national
20 security obligations.

21 Senator Franken. Anyone else care to jump in on that?

22 Mr. Bartlett. Sir, I would just say that, in addition
23 to 9/11, I think with the Iraq response and our resettlement
24 response to Iraqis and any obligation I think that we owe to
25 many of those--well, to all those Iraqis who worked for us,

1 we also layered on a new check, and that was a moment in
2 time when a new check was developed with two different
3 security agencies, and that also impacted our arrivals.
4 But, again, we did that out of a sense of responsibility to
5 the people that--not only the people that we are bringing
6 here but the people that we are bringing them to, you know,
7 our communities.

8 So I think you are correct that we have had larger
9 programs in the past. In response, I think the
10 infrastructure we work with now is a little more
11 complicated. The intention is to not only grow this 85,000
12 program to 100,000, perhaps in years beyond, we will see;
13 but to do it in a way that is responsible to our
14 communities.

15 Senator Franken. Before I run out of time, I want to
16 ask this question, which I think speaks to the whole
17 hearing, the whole subject in a different way. I am not
18 sure if anyone has asked this. I am sorry. I went down to
19 the floor and gave a speech on something else.

20 I think it bears repeating that approximately 4 million
21 people have fled violence in Syria, and that is roughly 17
22 percent of the country's total population, and, of course,
23 those that are internally displaced. Families, many of them
24 with children, are braving these treacherous journeys in
25 order to escape persecution. Senator Durbin brought up

1 Aylan Kurdi and that picture that I do not think anyone who
2 has seen it will ever forget. And like Senator Durbin, I
3 have a grandson who that image reminds me very much of.

4 And also Senator Durbin--do you mind if I go a few
5 seconds over?

6 Chairman Sessions. No.

7 Senator Blumenthal. I do.

8 Senator Franken. You do?

9 [Laughter.]

10 Senator Franken. Okay. I will do this as fast as I
11 can.

12 Senator Blumenthal. I am just kidding.

13 Senator Franken. Okay. I never know when you are
14 kidding.

15 [Laughter.]

16 Senator Blumenthal. I just want to know why he got the
17 louder laugh.

18 Senator Franken. Timing.

19 [Laughter.]

20 Senator Franken. This is such a sober subject. Many
21 of our partners in the EU are formulating a plan--are going
22 to redistribute some 120,000 migrants among member states.
23 Germany has stepped up. The U.S., on the other hand, thus
24 far has accepted only 1,500 Syrian refugees, although the
25 administration plans to expand the number to 10,000. I have

1 joined colleagues--Senator Durbin mentioned the letter that
2 he and Senator Klobuchar led. I was on that letter saying--
3 this is quite a while ago--urging the administration to
4 resettle 65,000 by the end of 2016.

5 This is what I want to ask, because I think these
6 numbers are important in the context of the debate about
7 national security. Director Bartlett, do you think that
8 strong leadership from the United States on this issue would
9 boost our standing in the region? And should we not be
10 concerned that a tepid response here lends credence to the
11 kind of narrative that our enemies spin about the United
12 States in their efforts to sow discord?

13 Mr. Bartlett. Sir, I would submit that our leadership
14 has been strong in the region. We stepped up early on, not
15 just for the Syrian crisis but also the Iraqi crisis. You
16 know, our footprint originally in the region was emergency
17 response, and people have asked us before, you know, why we
18 have been slow to resettle. Well, we are not the only ones
19 who have been slow to resettle affirmatively. UNHCR, in
20 fact, only started a resettlement program about 2 years ago
21 for Syrians because the hope for the Syrian people, and I
22 think the hope of the international community, is that
23 people can go home. And that is really what any refugee
24 wants, is they want the ability to go home, and that is to
25 Syria.

1 So it is really only about 2 years ago that UNHCR as an
2 institution said it has been too long, the countries that
3 are hosting these refugees are bearing too much of a
4 responsibility, and we need to help. And UNHCR was very
5 aggressive in setting a pretty high benchmark for all of us.
6 We joined early on. We did not announce a number. We did
7 not announce a goal. We basically said we are open for
8 referrals. At the moment we have 19,000, and we are going
9 to continue to accept those. So although we have a 10,000-
10 entrant goal for this next year, we are not limited by that
11 goal, and we will continue to accept referrals from UNHCR as
12 this tragedy continues.

13 Senator Franken. Thank you. I would just submit--and
14 I am way over. I would submit that that is something to be
15 thinking about.

16 Thank you.

17 Ms. Strack. Senator, if I may just add very briefly,
18 Senator Durbin mentioned in his opening remarks that we do
19 have a long process in the U.S. program in order for someone
20 to come into the system, our average processing times. I do
21 not think any of us are satisfied with those average
22 processing times, and I can tell you that I have very strong
23 direction from my Deputy Secretary to look hard at the
24 places where we can effect efficiencies without cutting
25 corners in any way in order to see that we can be more

1 efficient so that when those referrals do come to us, we are
2 able to process them effectively and efficiently as much as
3 we possibly can.

4 Chairman Sessions. Senator Franken, I would just note
5 that in 2013 the United States issued 117,000 green cards--
6 that is permanent residency in the United States, a pathway
7 to citizenship--to migrants from Muslim countries, including
8 70,000 to migrants from just Middle Eastern countries,
9 admitted 40,000 designated refugees and asylum seekers--
10 refugees and asylum seeker, which are essentially the same,
11 from all Muslim nations. I think we have been generous.

12 Senator Franken. I am sorry, Mr. Chairman.

13 Chairman Sessions. I just wanted to make that point.
14 I understand.

15 Senator Blumenthal?

16 Senator Blumenthal. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I
17 want to thank Senator Franken for his excellent questions
18 and his comments. And he is absolutely right that this
19 issue deserves the most sober of treatment.

20 I beg to differ, Mr. Bartlett. We may have stepped up
21 more recently, but we have done far less than we should have
22 in the region. Having visited some of those camps, Al-
23 Zaatari, for example, I think the United States could and
24 should have done more and now can and should do more. And
25 not just because it improves our standing in the region, but

1 it improves our sense of self-worth as a Nation. We are a
2 Nation of immigrants, and many of those immigrants are
3 refugees, like my father who came to this country in 1935 to
4 escape persecution in Germany at the age of 17, speaking
5 virtually no English, having not much more than the shirt on
6 his back, and knowing almost no one. And this country gave
7 him a chance to succeed, just as we will countless other
8 refugees in the future, as we have done in the past with
9 refugees of many, many other countries. And the need for
10 this program is as serious and urgent as ever because there
11 is no shortage in the world of inhumane dictators,
12 territorial conflicts, environmental crises that contribute
13 to the largest refugee crisis since World War II. That is
14 what we are facing right now.

15 My view is that we need to improve and speed the
16 screening techniques because the American people need to be
17 satisfied, as has been expressed here, about the efficacy
18 and accuracy of those screening techniques.

19 I have proposed a number of reforms, three in
20 particular, for example, expanding the P3 program, which
21 gives resettlement applicants with U.S. families the ability
22 to skip the referrals from the UNHCR and apply directly to
23 the Resettlement Support Center; second, improving the
24 timing and security of medical and security screenings to
25 ensure that applicants or their entire families do not have

1 their checks expire, forcing them to redo many of those
2 screenings, when individual parts of the test expire while
3 they are waiting for other parts to be completed; and,
4 third, keeping families updated about their status.
5 Frequently a large family's resettlement will be delayed
6 because a single family member is waiting to be approved.

7 Those are kind of common-sense, straightforward methods
8 of reforming the screening process so that it takes weeks,
9 not years, to reach conclusion, and I think they are doable.
10 They may require more resources. But that is where the
11 United States Congress should be involved, and I will be
12 sending a letter within a few days detailing those
13 proposals.

14 The large audience here I think is testimony to the
15 importance of this subject, again, not just because of our
16 standing or image in the world but our self-image, our self-
17 worth, our view of ourselves as a Nation. My feeling is
18 that the American people still believe that we are the
19 Nation of the Statue of Liberty, that we have arms open to
20 people who want to come here for opportunity and freedom and
21 to escape persecution and harm abroad.

22 Mr. Chairman, if there is no objection, I would like to
23 enter into the record some of the evidence of that
24 widespread interest and support: a letter from former
25 Republican and Democratic officials, including Ambassadors

1 Ryan Crocker and Robert Ford, and former Bush administration
2 official Robert Wolfowitz, calling for the United States to
3 accept 100,000 Syrian refugees; a letter from 18 mayors,
4 including Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, asking the Obama
5 administration to resettle Syrian refugees in their cities
6 because, I am quoting, "refugees make our communities
7 stronger economically, socially, and culturally"; and a
8 letter signed by 400 faith leaders expressing strong
9 opposition to any effort to limit the resettlement of Muslim
10 refugees.

11 Chairman Sessions. Without objection.

12 Senator Blumenthal. Thank you.

13 [The information follows:]

14 / SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT

1 Senator Blumenthal. And if I may just ask a question,
2 although I am, with your permission, going beyond my time.
3 Mr. Bartlett, and anyone else who wants to answer, if the P3
4 program were expanded to settlement applicants with American
5 family members, would that have any negative impact on our
6 national security? And would you be willing to consider
7 such an expansion?

8 Ms. Strack. Senator, I think that is something we
9 would certainly take under advisement and discuss amongst
10 ourselves. There have historically been some problems with
11 the Priority 3 program in terms of false claims of family
12 relationships. You may be aware we suspended the program
13 for a period of time until we were able to reintroduce some
14 integrity features. So I think with the proposed expansion
15 of the eligibility categories in the United States, we would
16 want to think about it very carefully through that lens and
17 based on that experience to make sure that in expanding it
18 that we had the appropriate safeguards at the same time.

19 And if I may mention, of your three points that you
20 addressed earlier, I think on the second piece about
21 improving the timing of security checks and addressing the
22 issue of having them expire, that has traditionally been a
23 challenge for all of us. But we do have some recent
24 improvements I think we could share with you and brief your
25 staff. We have introduced some automation just this past

1 summer, with the agencies that do the vetting, and we
2 believe that is going to address significantly--through the
3 institution of recurrent vetting is going to help us
4 ameliorate that problem of security checks expiring and the
5 challenges that that has presented to us. So I think we
6 will have some positive news for you on that score.

7 Senator Blumenthal. Does anyone else want to address
8 that question?

9 [No response.]

10 Senator Blumenthal. I am aware that some changes have
11 been implemented. I would be interested not only in your
12 plans but in evidence that, in fact, they are having an
13 effect, because I think that the credibility of the entire
14 Refugee Settlement Program hinges on effective screening,
15 and one of the principal measures of effectiveness is
16 timeliness. And the delays can, in effect, be self-
17 fulfilling expectations when those tests or screenings in
18 effect expire, and they should expire after a period of
19 time, but they need to be done more expeditiously.

20 So I thank the Chairman for his patience. I have a lot
21 more questions which I will submit for the record.

22 [The questions of Senator Blumenthal follows:]

23 / SUBCOMMITTEE INSERT

1 Senator Blumenthal. Thank you.

2 Chairman Sessions. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

3 I thank you, panel, I would just kind of like to walk
4 through some of the details of how you do your work, because
5 I believe that as presently constructed, we are not able to
6 do what you are suggesting today we are able to do, and the
7 costs are much greater, Mr. Carey, than you suggested in
8 your statement. We have got billions of dollars in costs
9 that are going to occur as a result of all the programs that
10 refugees are entitled to receive. And while we had 18
11 Democratic mayors asking President Obama to send more Syrian
12 refugees to their cities, homelessness in the United States
13 has doubled since the last recession. We have a financial
14 crisis, too. Every new dollar spent on these refugees will
15 essentially be borrowed because it is new expenditure and we
16 do not have new revenue to pay for it.

17 New York City Mayor de Blasio called for more refugees,
18 but had originally said this is a European problem. I do
19 not think the Europeans helped us with the Central American
20 problem. We have got countries like Brazil and Argentina
21 that are not taking any refugees. New York City Hall
22 announced it would spend \$1 billion more over the next 4
23 years focusing on homelessness in New York.

24 So I would say somebody needs to be talking about the
25 American people, what we want to do. We want to help. We

1 are helping. We are doing more financially than any other
2 country in the world to help deal with this crisis. And I
3 do not accept the idea that we are not doing our fair share.
4 And Europe should be picking up the largest share of the
5 problem, frankly, and I do not see it there. And a good
6 policy is that people should be helped to stay as close to
7 home as possible, and our overriding policy goal should be
8 to create stability in Syria and Libya and Yemen and Iraq so
9 people can go home. And we have allowed that to get away
10 from us. And we can criticize our policymakers for allowing
11 this dangerous humanitarian disaster to occur. I just would
12 say I think we have to ask those questions about who we are
13 going to serve and whose interest we are trying to serve.

14 Now, Mr. Emrich, can you name a single computer
15 database outside of maybe some very, very small but
16 significantly valuable intelligence databases for Syria that
17 you run a check against? Does Syria have any that you can
18 access?

19 Mr. Emrich. The Government of Syria does not, no, sir.

20 Chairman Sessions. All right. So, fundamentally, they
21 are the ones that keep records. We keep them in the United
22 States on people who are arrested and so forth. But you do
23 not have access to any if they exist in Syria?

24 Mr. Emrich. As Ms. Strack mentioned, in most cases
25 these individuals do have documents from Syria. We do have

1 various ways of identifying those documents. As she
2 described, our officers are trained in fraud detection. And
3 I would be happy to--we would be happy to brief you in
4 another setting on some of the ways that we have to do this.

5 Chairman Sessions. Well, in a public setting--I am
6 asking you to be--talk to the American people. The American
7 people are asking you a question. I read what the FBI
8 Director said. He said there is no database to check. He
9 suggests there is no way that they can get sufficient
10 information on--implies a substantial majority of these
11 persons. So aren't you left to basically look at whatever
12 document they produce and conducting an interview?

13 Mr. Emrich. I can assure the American people that we
14 have a robust series of screening measures here that
15 encompass the wide range of U.S. Government resources, that
16 involve U.S. law enforcement agencies and intelligence
17 community members, that these processes and these screening
18 measures are constantly reviewed, that we are continuously
19 looking at ways to improve these, that they incorporate both
20 biometric and biographic checks; they incorporate an in-
21 depth interview with a trained U.S. Government officer; they
22 involve an additional interview--or inspection, rather, when
23 the person presents himself or herself at the U.S. port of
24 entry.

25 Ms. Strack. Senator, if I may, we have not--

1 Chairman Sessions. I am just going to say this: I
2 have been in law enforcement 15 years. I know how the
3 National Crime Information Center works. I know how you run
4 background checks, Mr. Emrich. There is no way you can do
5 background checks of any significance. I am sure we have
6 some intelligence data on a number of people throughout the
7 region, and if you get a hit on that, I am sure you would
8 reject them. But you have only a minuscule number of people
9 that have been identified, I am sure, in that fashion. And
10 I do not believe you can tell us with any certainty that you
11 have an ability to conduct an efficient background check.

12 And let us say you have no information. Let us say
13 there is a question. Do you have any ability to send an
14 investigator to Iraq to check and see if the person actually
15 lived on this street, actually had the job he claims to have
16 had?

17 Ms. Strack. Sir, if I may--

18 Chairman Sessions. I was talking to Mr. Emrich.

19 Ms. Strack. Okay.

20 Mr. Emrich. While we do not have the ability to send
21 an investigator to Syria, we do have resources that we can
22 use to verify various elements of someone's testimony and
23 story.

24 Chairman Sessions. Well, I am sure there are things
25 you could do. Are you telling us you can do that for a

1 majority of the people that you interview? You have the
2 ability for a majority of the people you interview to have
3 independent data of value to help identify them?

4 Mr. Emrich. We in many cases are able to find
5 independent data.

6 Chairman Sessions. Many cases. I asked a majority.

7 Mr. Emrich. I cannot quantify. I have seen--

8 Chairman Sessions. 20 percent or 80 percent you get
9 positive data from? Can you tell us? Is it less than 20 or
10 more than 80?

11 Mr. Emrich. I cannot give you a number.

12 Chairman Sessions. Well, the reason is you do not have
13 the ability. I wish you did, but you do not.

14 Ms. Strack?

15 Ms. Strack. Mr. Emrich covered the point I was going
16 to cover, sir.

17 Mr. Bartlett. Mr. Chair, if I could just--sorry, not
18 on security screening, but I want to go back to a point you
19 made about humanitarian response.

20 Chairman Sessions. Right.

21 Mr. Bartlett. The U.S. responsibilities versus those
22 of other countries in the world. And I know you mentioned
23 Brazil is not taking refugees. I wanted to set the record
24 straight that Brazil, in fact, has stepped up quite large in
25 terms of the Syria crisis. They have done a humanitarian

1 visa program and have allowed thousands of Syrians to come
2 to Brazil. They are not coming technically as refugees, but
3 they are coming from the immediate region of the Middle
4 East. So there are about 30 countries that are involved in
5 refugee resettlement of Syrians, and so, you know, you are
6 right, right now Europe is taking the bulk because people
7 are moving across land borders. But there are countries
8 like New Zealand, Australia, and Canada that are also
9 playing a significant role.

10 Thank you.

11 Chairman Sessions. Well, according to the information
12 I have, the United States has six times more migrants than
13 all the Latin American countries combined. Do you dispute
14 that?

15 Mr. Bartlett. I am only talking about refugees at this
16 point, sir.

17 Chairman Sessions. Well, I have also seen numbers that
18 indicate that perhaps they have agreed in recent--how long
19 ago was that that they have agreed to step up their--

20 Mr. Bartlett. It has been within the last year. It
21 might be 6 to 8 months. But they have done quite a large
22 job.

23 Chairman Sessions. All right. Well, we have been
24 doing it for a long time. We have been very generous and I
25 think the world leader in doing this. And we are proud of

1 that, and we want to be a great country for handling
2 refugees. I just believe that we need to understand the
3 reality, how much it is going to cost and the danger of
4 admitting those who could be a threat to the United States.

5 Ms. Strack, there was a number of examples of people
6 who have involved themselves in terrorism since they have
7 been in the United States. Sometimes when they come, they
8 may not be radicalized, but somehow, some way, become
9 radicalized. There is no way you could identify that, I do
10 not suppose. Is there?

11 Ms. Strack. No, sir, we cannot predict the future.

12 Chairman Sessions. So we know the Boston bombers came
13 as refugees.

14 Ms. Strack. They did not, sir.

15 Chairman Sessions. They did not? How did they come?

16 Ms. Strack. I would have to check with my some of my
17 colleagues, but they were not refugees.

18 Chairman Sessions. Were their parents refugees?

19 Ms. Strack. I will need to check with some of my other
20 USCIS colleagues.

21 Chairman Sessions. We had a Bosnian refugee along with
22 wife and relatives charged with donating money, supplies,
23 and smuggled arms to terrorist organizations in Syria and
24 Iraq. I do not think that is in dispute. Ramiz Hodzic and
25 his wife were among six Bosnians living in Minnesota,

1 Illinois, and New York who were charged last week conspiring
2 to provide material support to groups that we consider
3 terrorist organizations.

4 An Uzbek refugee living in Idaho was arrested and
5 charged with providing support to terrorist organizations in
6 the form of teaching terror recruits how to build a bomb.

7 And Somali Americans in Minnesota were charged--seven
8 were charged with trying to join ISIS.

9 So it is not an easy job. There is always risk. We
10 want to be sure you are fully equipped and able to do the
11 best job we can, and I think we should be careful as we go
12 forward and always try to protect the national safety, as
13 you indicate.

14 Do you know, can any of you tell me how many people who
15 have been given refugee status since 2001 have been
16 identified as affiliated with terrorism in any manner?

17 [No response.]

18 Chairman Sessions. Well, we have got a lot of public
19 records on them. I certainly do not have the full number,
20 that is for sure.

21 USCIS is generally fee-funded. Of course, there are a
22 lot of things you could spend those fees on, and if you use
23 fees to expand dramatically the number of refugees from
24 Syria or other places in the Middle East, that does tend to
25 drain the money, does it not, Ms. Strack, that you would

1 otherwise have for other needs of your agency?

2 Ms. Strack. Yes, sir. In order to reprioritize fee
3 funding to the refugee program in fiscal year 2016, that
4 will come out of other USCIS priorities.

5 Chairman Sessions. To follow up on, I guess, Mr.
6 Tillis' or Mr. Perdue's question, Mr. Bartlett, if we go to
7 100,000, are you aware of how many of those over the 75,000
8 this year--that is 25,000 more--how many of those would be
9 coming from Syria and/or the region?

10 Mr. Bartlett. We do not have a projection what it
11 would look like when we bring 100,000 in. What I can tell
12 you is that we traditionally respond to the humanitarian
13 crisis of the time. And so in the last 5 years, we have
14 resettled a number of Burmese, Bhutanese, Somalis, Iraqis--
15 some of those who worked for us--now increasingly Syrians,
16 and Congolese. And we have had a very big program build on
17 the Congolese coming out of the Democratic Republic of the
18 Congo who have been in basically asylum, kind of temporary
19 asylum conditions for many, many years. So, again, those
20 will be the populations. They will shift according to, you
21 know, if peace, for example, exists or if conditions exist
22 to be able to return home, then those populations decline.
23 But one would predict that probably Syria and Iraq would
24 continue to be large.

25 Chairman Sessions. Secretary Kerry indicated that when

1 he gave us some sort of consultation. He told us--he
2 floated the figure 75,000 for next year, then 85,000 we
3 heard. And he told us, he warned us it might be
4 substantially more. So 100,000 would certainly be a lot,
5 well within what he suggested he may recommend. So we do
6 not get fees from those, do we, Ms. Strack? I mean, it is a
7 normal immigrant that has to pay fees that help subsidize
8 these kind of procedures.

9 Ms. Strack. That is correct, sir. There is no fee to
10 apply for refugee status.

11 Chairman Sessions. The Washington Post said that Azar
12 Zareb and his wife arrived in 2002 as refugees. Their sons
13 and daughters followed a short time later--from Chechnya, of
14 course. It indicates at least the parents, if not the sons,
15 came as refugees, would it not?

16 Ms. Strack. I would need to check with my colleagues,
17 sir.

18 Chairman Sessions. What about the parole program? Is
19 that under the Homeland Security section?

20 Ms. Strack. It actually is a shared responsibility
21 with the dissolution of the former Immigration and
22 Nationality Service into the immigration operational
23 divisions at Department of Homeland Security. CBP, Customs
24 and Border Protection, as well as USCIS have parole
25 authority.

1 Chairman Sessions. It was indicated in a staff
2 briefing that DHS is looking at a categorical case-by-case
3 program for parole, which is a program that has, I think,
4 some difficulties. And I am not sure it is the kind of
5 thing that ought to be done with regard to Syria, but
6 apparently it is being considered. Is it still being
7 considered, to your knowledge, using the parole program to
8 deal with the Syrian problem?

9 Ms. Strack. Sir, the USCIS received a letter that had
10 been signed by 70 Members of Congress asking the
11 administration to consider what we have called a "Syrian
12 family reunification parole program." At the time there was
13 a model based on a Cuban family reunification program.
14 Under the design of the Cuban program, family members in the
15 United States were eligible to apply for green cards for
16 their family members. It is the Form I-130. So they are
17 eligible for that application and had been approved
18 beneficiaries, but their family members were not able to
19 actually take advantage of that and come to the United
20 States because of the numerical limits on family-based
21 immigration every year. So the program in Cuba was to take
22 those people who are, in fact, eligible for green cards and
23 let them come to the United States and wait in the United
24 States in lieu of waiting in Cuba. So the letter that we
25 received recommended that the administration consider a

1 similar sort of program, so this would be a relative in the
2 United States who would petition on behalf of a close
3 relative, and if that beneficiary was a Syrian, the
4 recommendation was that we consider granting parole to that
5 Syrian beneficiary.

6 At the time, the administration made a decision not to
7 do that program at that point in time. As the conditions
8 have continued to deteriorate and as we have had requests
9 from other stakeholders to take another look at that, my
10 leadership has agreed that they would take another look at
11 that program. It does not mean that the decision will
12 change, but they have agreed to consider it.

13 Chairman Sessions. Well, you got a request, and I am
14 sure you should consider it. I think that is a problematic
15 way to do business. We are increasing the numbers of
16 refugees for Syria, and I think that is the appropriate way
17 to openly and directly deal with that. The parole system
18 was never designed to be used in this fashion, as I
19 understand the law.

20 With regard to resettlement, I guess, Mr. Carey, does
21 that fall within your area?

22 Mr. Carey. Yes, it does.

23 Chairman Sessions. In general, I believe you had some
24 sort of consultation with communities about a desire to
25 resettle a number of people in their community. What is

1 your policy on that? And can you assure us that any
2 community that would receive a direct flow of refugees would
3 be consulted before this happens?

4 Mr. Carey. I believe I will defer to my colleagues at
5 the Department of State on that who handled the admissions
6 and placement portion of the program.

7 Mr. Bartlett. So, sir, I can--the State Department has
8 a responsibility first for the placement of the refugees in
9 U.S. communities, and HHS' responsibilities then are longer
10 term in terms of support and integration, adjustment.
11 Again, we do consult very closely at the community level.
12 We put the responsibility on the partner in that community,
13 so the affiliates I talked about before, 320 or so. And we
14 ask them--in fact, we require them to do consultations each
15 quarter of the year.

16 Chairman Sessions. Consultations with the mayor or the
17 Governor?

18 Mr. Bartlett. Consultations included elected
19 officials, so it could be city council as well as mayor. It
20 includes other people who are providing services, so
21 schools, health clinics, other medical service providers,
22 law enforcement, as well as volunteer groups that are
23 supporting refugees. So we want to talk with the broad
24 community, not just the people who are involved exactly in
25 the resettlement program, but also people who are affected

1 by it. And so that consultation takes place quarterly.
2 That consultation includes a representative from the State
3 government, so somebody who is working either attached to
4 the Governor's office or who has communication with the
5 Governor's office, and then those consultations are fed back
6 through the national headquarters and then to the State
7 Department.

8 And what I can assure you is--and, in fact, I was just
9 in Twin Falls, Idaho, 2 weeks ago--that we want to listen to
10 every voice in the community. Not everybody is a supporter
11 of refugees. Not everybody is a supporter of Syrian
12 resettlement. So we want to take all of those voices into
13 account and see how we can respond. What I can tell you is
14 that overwhelmingly we find that the majority of citizens
15 appreciate the program and support it. And so we want to
16 find a way to make that work for everybody.

17 Chairman Sessions. Very good. Well, we are talking
18 about a very major undertaking. A Heritage Foundation study
19 has reported that 10,000 refugees over a lifetime will cost
20 the United States Treasury \$4 billion--excuse me, \$6.5
21 billion for 10,000, because most of the people are going to
22 struggle at lower incomes. So there is a cost on that. And
23 then you say you go to 30,000, 70,000, 100,000, that is a
24 substantial cost. And each year if you did another 100,000,
25 over 30 years you have increased a very large number of

1 people statistically speaking will be drawing more benefits
2 than they pay in. And it puts stress on Medicare, it puts
3 stress on the food stamp program, it puts stress on Social
4 Security and Medicare, because most will pay into the
5 program presumably if they work, but like most people they
6 will pay in less than they take out, and that is why those
7 programs are on such a crisis path today. So it is a huge
8 financial cost.

9 And then we have the difficulty of being able to screen
10 the applicants effectively, and I think if you need more
11 help, Mr. Emrich or Ms. Strack, I hope you will ask for it.
12 I am worried that it is almost impossible, even with more
13 staff, to really get the information because we are not
14 going to be able, as some people might think, to go out to
15 the neighborhood and actually interview people to make sure
16 this is the same person who lived on this street, that
17 worked at this job, and was a good and decent person. So we
18 see that in Europe, how it is happening in huge numbers.

19 I believe the American people are generous and kind and
20 decent. They want to contribute to helping solve this
21 refugee crisis. And we are in a significant degree. But we
22 are entitled to have our officials protect our interest, the
23 people's interest, and that is what I think we have tried to
24 do today. I do not blame any of you for the difficult job
25 you have, but I do think that we need to ask ourselves how

1 so much instability occurred in the world. We need to ask
2 ourselves how we can positively assure that stability is
3 returned to as much of that area of the world as possible
4 and to try to create a circumstance and financially help in
5 a humanitarian way people that are really hurting. And many
6 of them are, and we know that.

7 So thank you for your service to your country. We
8 appreciate that. So the record will stay open for 1 week,
9 and you are dismissed. Thank you very much.

10 [Whereupon, at 4:05 p.m., the Subcommittee was
11 adjourned.]

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