

**Questions for the Record Submitted to  
Director Larry Bartlett  
Senator David Vitter (#1)  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
October 1, 2015**

**Question:**

**Background:** You told ABC News, “One of the fundamental principles of our country is that we care about others. We will help others.” You also said every refugee is vetted through an “intense” system. In fact, PRM Assistant Secretary Anne C. Richard listed as a “Fiscal Year 2014 Accomplishment” that “PRM, DHS, and law enforcement and intelligence agencies successfully protected the refugee admissions program from infiltration by bad actors.” However, Chairman Sessions mentioned during this October 1, 2015, hearing that FBI Assistant Director of Counterterrorism Michael Steinbach on February 11, 2015, before the House Committee on Homeland Security, expressed significant concerns with screening Syrian refugees. Steinbach testified, “The concern in Syria is that we don’t have systems in places on the ground to collect information to vet. . . . the concern is we would be vetting databases that don’t hold information on those individuals. . . . You’re talking about a country that is a failed state. That is, does not have any infrastructure . . . so all of the datasets – the police, the intel services – that normally you would go to seek information don’t exist.” However, you testified, “I can assure you, on our side, there will be no shortcuts on security. There will be no shortcuts on medical screening. There will be no shortcuts on processing. . . . There will be no shortcuts on our responsibilities to the American people.”

- a. Is FBI’s Assistant Director of Counterterrorism incorrect? Do we have systems in place on the ground in Syria to collect enough information to properly screen refugees?
- b. Approximately how many hours of the 18-to-24-month admission process is a U.S. official actively working on vetting a particular individual?
- c. How can PRM be so confident this intense vetting process completely eliminated the threat of ISIS infiltration in the Syrian Refugee

program in 2014?

- d. Does PRM have the same absolute confidence it will prevent ISIS terrorists from infiltrating the refugee program indefinitely?
- e. What is the foundation for this assertion?
- f. What additional resources do you have to meet this new ceiling of 85,000?
- g. What sacrifices will you be forced to make to meet this new ceiling, and won't that negatively affect your assurances of national security?

**Answer:**

The Administration remains deeply committed to safeguarding the American people while providing refuge to the world's most vulnerable. The Administration made the decision to participate in the global effort to resettle Syrian refugees only after concluding that we could do so safely and consistent with U.S. national security. This remains our guiding principle.

President Obama and Secretary Kerry are determined to ensure that the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) meets the highest security standards. This Administration has taken a number of steps in recent years to further intensify our already rigorous refugee screening. The U.S. government screens refugees while they are still overseas, long before they are potentially admitted to the United States, in a process that is intensive and deliberate.

The USRAP has a long history of safely admitting refugees from violent conflicts, and the USRAP has long been mindful of threats posed by al-Qaeda and ISIL. That is precisely why the screening process in place for all refugees, including Syrians, is so robust.

All refugees of all nationalities considered for admission to the United States undergo the most intensive level of security screening of any category of traveler to the United States involving multiple federal intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, including the National Counterterrorism Center, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Departments of Homeland Security, State and Defense, in order to ensure that those admitted are not known to pose a threat to our country.

These safeguards include biometric (fingerprint) and biographic checks, and a lengthy in-depth interview by specially trained DHS officers who scrutinize the applicant's explanation of individual circumstances to ensure the applicant is a bona fide refugee and is not known to present security concerns to the United States. (The classified details of the refugee security screening process are regularly shared with relevant Congressional Committees.)

The burden of proof in the refugee application process is on the refugee – the refugee must show he or she qualifies for refugee status. U.S.

law and regulations requires that each applicant provides DHS/USCIS with information that better enables our law enforcement and intelligence communities to confirm their identity and assess whether they present a security risk to the country. If DHS' highly trained Refugee Corps officers are not satisfied with the information provided, the applicant will not be permitted to travel to the United States. A lack of derogatory information on an applicant is not in and of itself sufficient evidence to pass the security clearance.

Mindful of the particular conditions of the Syria crisis, Syrian refugees go through yet additional forms of security screening. The screening process is multi-layered and recurrent and involves a rigorous security review. We check extensively against law enforcement and intelligence community holdings—and those holdings are regularly updated and enhanced to ensure we have the most current and accurate information possible.

DHS has full discretion to deny admission to any refugee including on national security grounds and has done so in numerous cases. DHS' decisions are guided by the key principle directed by the President and affirmed throughout the U.S. government – that the safety and security of the American people must always come first.

All refugees, including Syrians, may only be admitted to the U.S. after DHS/USCIS receives the security checks undertaken by the intelligence and law enforcement communities and all issues are resolved. Only then does DHS/USCIS affirmatively determine they are admissible to the U.S.

While the U.S. Department of State manages the USRAP, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security manages the federal interagency screening process and only DHS has the authority to grant refugee admission on an individual basis. For additional questions regarding the screening process, we would refer you to DHS.

For additional information on the refugee resettlement process you may wish to consult DHS' detailed guide to the process at the following link: *<http://www.uscis.gov/refugeescreening>*.

The Administration is currently evaluating the total funding required to admit additional refugees above the 75,000 included in the FY 2016 President's Request.