

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

Question:

Mr. Bartlett, in your testimony you state that two million Syrian refugees are currently in Turkey, over one million are in Lebanon, over 600,000 are in Jordan. Also, you say Egypt and Iraq have opened their borders to almost 400,000 Syrians and are providing assistance and protection.

And yet, according to Amnesty International, the Gulf states (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain), as well as affluent Asian economies like Japan and South Korea, have accepted no Syrian refugees at all. Russia, which has now commenced military operations in Syria, has also offered zero resettlement spots to Syrian refugees.

1. What is the Department of State doing to convince other countries in the Middle East, especially affluent countries like Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, to accept Syrian refugees?

Answer:

The United States continues to actively encourage countries in the Middle East and around the world to support refugees. Countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey have taken in millions of Syrian refugees. Gulf countries have made significant monetary contributions in humanitarian aid.

None of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol and they have been cautious in

accepting Syrians in refugee status. GCC states have instead allowed some Syrians to enter and remain in their countries through granting work permits and extending residency permits. We continue to encourage them to find ways for additional Syrians to enter, particularly vulnerable Syrians, by increasing the number of residency and work permits available and increasing cooperation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

We encourage all countries, including those in the Gulf, to fulfill all outstanding pledges, and encourage new financial contributions on a recurring annual basis through the UN system to avoid duplication. We were recently pleased to hear of the establishment of the King Salman Humanitarian Center and we look forward to coordinating humanitarian efforts with Saudi Arabia and other partners in the humanitarian response.

We also continue to encourage GCC states to follow up on the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) September 13 Emergency Meeting in Jeddah, which focused on the Syrian refugee crisis. Specifically, we urge all OIC members to join the Refugee Convention as called for by OIC Secretary General Madani (over half of all OIC members, including all the Gulf countries, are not parties to that Convention), take in more refugees,

and adopt an OIC framework on refugees to promote cooperation between OIC members to help alleviate the refugee crisis in the Muslim world.

We also urge these countries to follow up on plans for an OIC ministerial to discuss and adopt a plan of action on refugee issues in OIC states.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Chuck Grassley (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

Mr. Bartlett, in your testimony you state that two million Syrian refugees are currently in Turkey, over one million are in Lebanon, over 600,000 are in Jordan. Also, you say Egypt and Iraq have opened their borders to almost 400,000 Syrians and are providing assistance and protection.

And yet, according to Amnesty International, the Gulf states (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain), as well as affluent Asian economies like Japan and South Korea, have accepted no Syrian refugees at all. Russia, which has now commenced military operations in Syria, has also offered zero resettlement spots to Syrian refugees.

2. Has the Department raised the issue of refugee resettlement with affluent Asian countries like Japan and South Korea?

Answer:

The Department has discussed and will continue to discuss refugee resettlement with countries around the world, including Japan and South Korea. Both countries participate in the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement hosted by UNHCR in Geneva. In addition, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration has provided technical expertise to both countries as they increase their resettlement programs.

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

Question:

1. The draft report submitted to the Senate and House Judiciary Committees indicated that the Department of State would need approximately \$503.7 million to process and resettle 75,000 refugees. The final report indicated that the Department of State would need the same amount of money to process and resettle 85,000 refugees.

- a. How much will this increase cost?
- b. How much will it cost to admit the 100,000 refugees that the administration has targeted for Fiscal Year 2017?
- c. Does the State Department intend to ask Congress for additional funds? If so, how much, and when?

Answer:

The Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2015: Report to the Congress includes a table outlining the total funding available or estimated availabilities to support the program, including the appropriation from Congress, carryover funds, and refugee loan repayment funds, among others. The President's Budget Request to Congress for FY 2016 was \$442.7 million for the Admissions program and included funding for a ceiling of 75,000 refugees. The Administration is currently evaluating the total funding required to admit an additional number of refugees above the 75,000

included in the initial FY 2016 President's Request, and it may require additional resources. The President's FY 2017 Request is still being formulated and the Administration is currently evaluating the total funding required for the program in FY 2017.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

2. You testified at the hearing that the Department of State has an approximate 80% repayment rate on the loans provided to refugees for travel to the United States.
- a. What is the average loan amount?
 - b. What is the average default amount?
 - c. How much money has the Department of State failed to recover due to defaults on loans provided to refugees over the last ten years?

Answer:

Refugees traveling to the U.S. are offered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) interest-free travel loans to pay for the costs of their transportation from overseas to U.S. resettlement sites. The average IOM loan amount per refugee is \$1,200 and the average loan note, which includes loans for all members of a refugee family, is \$2,500. The average number of individuals per note is about 2.1.

Approximately 70 percent of all loan amounts are repaid within 5 years and 78 percent of loan amounts are repaid within 10 years. Neither IOM nor the resettlement agencies charge interest, penalties or fees to delinquent loans, nor have they ever initiated legal action through the courts

against any delinquent loan-holder. IOM is responsible for ensuring the financial accountability of the loan program and compliance with all applicable U.S. laws pertaining to debt collection. IOM loans are subject to credit reporting requirements. Refugees can request extensions or changes to payment schedules and terms, if facing hardship. In addition, refugee loans can be canceled based on specific criteria including death, disability, old age, and bankruptcy. A loan is considered to be in default and then is returned to IOM for collection if the loan has not been extended or modified and no payments have been received within four consecutive months. The average default amount is \$1,981.

For \$645 million in loans provided to refugees over the last ten years, \$137 million (or 21 percent) is currently in default status. IOM continues to actively pursue rehabilitation and repayment of these loans including skip tracing, outbound calling, and changing payment schedules and terms.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#3)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

3. According to data available from the Department of State Refugee Processing Center's databases, out of the 1,670 refugees admitted from Syria during Fiscal Year 2015, 29 refugees, or 1.7%, were Christians. Out of the 10,000 refugees from Syria that the administration says it will resettle in Fiscal Year 2016, do you expect a similar percentage of Christians to be admitted to the United States?

Answer:

The United States is committed to assisting people of all ethnicities, religions and nationalities who are fleeing persecution, violence, and other causes of displacement. With regard to resettlement, our emphasis is on admitting the most vulnerable individuals with a well-founded fear of persecution based on one of the five protected grounds (race, religion, nationality, political opinion, and membership in a particular social group) under U.S. law, in a manner that is consistent with U.S. national security.

Since 2011, the United States has admitted over 2,200 Syrian refugees, four percent of whom are members of religious minorities, half of which were Christians. Pre-war demographics indicated that Christians made up around 10 percent of the population in Syria, or approximately 1.8

million Christians. It is unclear how many Christians have left the country, however it is estimated that Christians comprise far fewer than 10 percent of the Syrian refugee population. Based on this data, we expect a similar percentage of Syrian Christians admitted in FY 2016, although it could increase somewhat given planned resumption of refugee processing in Lebanon. (We believe Syrian Christians are more likely to seek refuge in Lebanon than other countries in the region.)

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#4)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

4. How many refugees from Syria do you anticipate will be admitted to the United States over the next five fiscal years through the Refugee Admissions Program?

Answer:

As Secretary Kerry announced in September, the United States would accept at least 85,000 refugees from around the world in Fiscal Year 2016 and at least 100,000 the following year. Of those accepted in 2016, at least 10,000 will be from Syria. He also stated we would be working hard to explore whether we could do more. This step is keeping with America's best tradition as a beacon of hope to those fleeing violence and persecution and a signal of solidarity to our allies and partners around the world. While we do not establish refugee admission targets by nationality five years out due to the emergency nature of refugee crises, in consultation with Congress we will continue to explore ways to increase those figures while maintaining robust security and screening protocols.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#5)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

5. Are members of the public able to attend quarterly consultations with state and local officials regarding refugee resettlement efforts?

Answer:

The Department of State requires resettlement agencies' local affiliates to convene quarterly community consultations with stakeholders in areas of resettlement. In some areas, the State Refugee Coordinator may convene the required quarterly meetings. Through these consultations and other means, the affiliates are able to continually gauge the capacity of the community for refugee resettlement. While the program is operated under federal authority, the resettlement agencies and the Department of State consider carefully the input received from its state and local stakeholders when determining the feasibility and capacity of a refugee resettlement program. Attendance at quarterly meetings is determined locally by meeting organizers.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Jeff Sessions (#6)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

6. When is the last time that the Department of State conducted a financial audit of the private contractors with which it works to provide refugee resettlement services?

Answer:

All Department of State cooperative agreements with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide refugee resettlement services require annual independent financial audits under the provisions of the Federal Grant Regulations (2 CFR Part 200 Subpart F –Audit Requirements). Accordingly, each NGO is audited annually.

**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.

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

Question:

1. Questions for Mr. Bartlett, Ms. Strack, Mr. Emrich

How extensive would you say our security screenings for refugee admissions are in comparison to the security screenings provided to other groups of people entering the United States?

Are refugees among the most carefully vetted of all travelers to the United States?

Answer:

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 Investigations, 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-person overseas 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.

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 if DHS/USCIS affirmatively determines refugees are admissible are they allowed to travel to the United States.

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 require 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 up-to-date and accurate information possible.

Our highest priority is the protection of the American people. We are committed to maintaining the integrity of the refugee vetting process even as we fulfill our moral responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance in the face of this historic refugee crisis.

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

Question:

Could screenings be better timed to avoid needless duplication and delay?

As several of the witnesses discuss in their testimony, applicants for resettlement in the United States go through a number of different screenings. As I understand it, these screenings generally have a limited validity period. If a certain amount of time has passed since the screening and an applicant has not resettled in the United States, the screening expires and the applicant has to start over. It is possible that a refugee could be delayed through no fault of her own if one screening expires before another can be completed, and the refugee has to endure the hassle, the expense, and the delay associated with completing the same screening twice. In some cases, an entire family could have their screenings expire while they wait for one family member to get final approval.

- a. This question is for whoever can speak to the issue. It may be a few of you. Is the Administration considering ways to better time the resettlement application process to ensure that applicants do not have to needlessly go through the same screenings multiple times?
- b. This seems like an area where the resettlement process could be made more efficient without any cost in terms of security. I would like to work with you on this. Would you keep me updated?

Answer:

The Administration continues to identify efficiency measures to streamline refugee admissions processing while still upholding rigorous security vetting requirements. Prior to travel, refugees undergo a wide range

of security checks and need to clear a medical exam. Each of these checks has different validity periods, and some checks are initiated at different time periods throughout the process. The Administration is reviewing the end-to-end processing workflow to identify where processing can be made more efficient. We are also working to develop more rigorous data analytics to guide when checks should be re-requested to try to maximize the potential for an approved, cleared refugee to travel to the United State before another check expires.

We appreciate your interest and will keep Congress apprised of improvements to the refugee admissions process.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#2)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

What happens when an entire family is delayed because a single family member has not been approved?

As you know, families frequently apply to resettle together. For a family to be accepted, each member must be screened and approved. I have heard concerns that, as a result, entire families will often be stalled because a single family member's application has gotten delayed.

- a. How often does that kind of thing happen—where a family is held up because of a single family member or maybe two family members?
- b. Do you have a process for expediting consideration of particular applicants when clearing one applicant would allow an entire family to move forward? Can you describe that process? How often do you use it?

It seems to me that, if an entire family is delayed because of a single family member, the family might want to know what is going on. Then the family could choose whether to continue their application as a group or to let the approved members of the family move forward and leave the delayed member to follow them later.

- c. Do you inform families when the whole family has been stalled because the application of a particular family member has been delayed?
- d. If not, would you be willing to consider doing so?

Answer:

The Administration recognizes the challenges that families face when their cases are delayed. When a case is delayed due to a single family member, it is most commonly due to potential concerns related to the security vetting checks for the family member. In this scenario, a case cannot move forward to travel until the Department of Homeland Security makes a final adjudication on the case, including the security checks. If there is a negative vetting determination made for one member of the family, the case for the entire family is closed and no one in the family can travel to the United States as a refugee.

For cases with urgent protection needs, there is a process for expediting the final adjudication of the case, including the disposition of the security checks. However, if the final determination is a denial for even one individual on a case, the denial will apply to all members of a case.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#3)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

What did you learn in Irbil about the treatment of Iraqi religious minorities?

Mr. Bartlett, as you likely know, I recently led a letter to Secretary Kerry concerning the protection of Iraqi religious minorities and the need to improve Iraqi refugee processing times. In particular, my colleagues and I requested Secretary Kerry to designate a Priority Two (P2) category for the persecuted religious minorities in Iraq. Further, we asked the State Department to accelerate processing times by: 1) doubling the number of personnel tasked with processing Iraqi refugees; 2) working with DHS to explore videoconferencing capabilities for interviewing refugees; 3) identifying non-governmental organizations to work with the U.S. Embassy to identify and screen religious minorities seeking in-country refugee assistance; and 4) establishing a facility in Irbil where refugee applicants can be processed.

I am aware that you traveled to Irbil a few weeks ago to meet with international organizations and explore options to address the overwhelming number of refugees.

- a. What were the major lessons or points you took away from this trip?

Answer:

Following my trip to Erbil, we moved forward in working with the UN and other organizations to establish a P-1 (individual referral) program for a small number of extremely vulnerable women and girls from religious minorities, including Yezidis in northern Iraq. We plan to commence the

identification process this month and begin interviewing cases in the January-February timeframe. We plan to have quarterly interview teams in Erbil throughout 2016.

**Questions for the Record Submitted to
Director Larry Bartlett
Senator Richard Blumenthal (#4)
Senate Judiciary Committee
October 1, 2015**

Question:

How many IACs are stuck in limbo, and how can that be resolved?

As you know, applicants for resettlement go through a screening known as the Interagency Check, or IAC. This process is in addition to a number of other biographic and biometric checks that applicants have to undergo. My understanding is that sometimes IACs are, at least initially, inconclusive. Applicants get back a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision”—meaning they have been neither approved nor denied. I have heard concerns that applicants who have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” are left in limbo and not given a chance to clear up whatever ambiguity led to them receiving an inconclusive check.

- a. As of today, how many applicants for resettlement have gotten a determination of “not cleared” or “no decision” but not yet had their cases resolved?
- b. Do you give applicants the opportunity to provide information you need to move their cases from inconclusive to resolved?
- c. Would you look into whether more can be done to let resettlement applicants help clarify any ambiguities in their checks—provided they can do so without accessing classified materials?

Answer:

The Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for determining the eligibility and admissibility of applicants to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and

is therefore best placed to answer questions regarding the security screening process and USCIS approvals and denials.