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Refugees score a win, further proof the travel ban is bunk

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President Donald Trump's four-month worldwide ban on refugees ended Tuesday, officials said, as his administration prepared to unveil tougher new screening procedures.

Under an executive order Trump signed earlier this year, the United States had temporarily halted admissions for refugees from all countries, with some exceptions. The end-date written into the order came and went Tuesday with no new order from Trump to extend it, according to a State Department official, who wasn't authorized to comment by name and requested anonymity.

Refugees seeking entry to the U.S. will face what officials described as more stringent and thorough examination of their backgrounds, in line with Trump's "extreme vetting" policy for immigrants. . . . Refugees already face an extensive backlog and waiting periods that can take years. Any additional screening would likely extend the timeline.

This does not mean the Trump administration has discovered its humanity. To the contrary, "Last month, Trump capped refugee admissions at 45,000 for the fiscal year that started Oct. 1, a cut of more than half from the 110,000 limit put in place the year earlier by President Barack Obama." That is just the cap; the actual number could be much lower. This abominable lack of compassion comes at a time that "65.6 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2016 – a total bigger than the population of the United Kingdom and about 300,000 more than last year," according to the U.N. Refugee Agency.

The new vetting procedures, according to news reports, do not at first blush appear overly burdensome:

Under the new rules, the administration will collect more biographical data, such as names of family members and places of employment, officials said. The administration will also do more to mine social media posts to see, for instance, if refugees' public pronouncements are consistent with the stories they offer in their applications, the officials said.

In addition, officials who do the screening at the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, will be given new guidance and better training aimed at detecting fraud on the part of applicants, one person said.

Other reports suggest the guidelines for screening women and children will be increased to the more stringent standard used for adult men. We will see in practice

Given the existing 18 to 24 month vetting process, refugees are already among the least likely pool of would-be terrorists so it would hardly be surprising that the new rules don't radically

change the existing scheme. “The proposed additional security measures are minor, again showing that the refugee vetting system is about as good as it can be,” says Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute. “These additional security measures will likely have near-zero benefits as refugees are already so safe and the proposed security measures are so minor.”

By abandoning the ban and adding apparently small minor fixes after months of hullabaloo, the administration’s move certainly adds to the suspicion that its entire travel ban scheme, including its multiple iterations of the travel ban on Muslim-majority countries, was designed purely for domestic consumption by Trump’s xenophobic base. If the administration could review and come up with new vetting requirements for refugees, certainly the same be done for immigrants from countries listed in the latest travel ban.

The newest travel ban regimen has been blocked by federal courts in Maryland and Hawaii. One wonders when the administration is going to give up on its bogus travel ban. Remember, the administration has been arguing in court after court that its travel ban provisions were vital to national security and could not be lifted without endangering Americans.

We are hopeful that the refugee action is the first and not the last step in Trump’s retreat from his constitutionally-flawed and racially-motivated ban on predominately Muslim countries. He has wasted too much of the taxpayers’ money, alienated too many allies and displayed all too well his xenophobic mind-set. It’s time to end the entire charade.