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Americans should all reject Mr. Trump's very bad idea

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The idea that our federal government should register and track members of any religious group should be immediately rejected by Americans.

That Donald Trump, a serious candidate for president of the U.S., would even entertain such a thought is surprising. What isn't so surprising is that, in recent days, the developer and former reality TV star has attempted to ignore or explain away what he meant when he initially endorsed the notion in an interview with a reporter.

He would have been better off disavowing the idea entirely. But at this writing, he still hadn't.

Such a government registry conjures up images of Jews in Nazi Germany, the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and the government persecution of many religious groups throughout the Soviet Union and eastern Europe during the Cold War.

No wonder other candidates were quick to attack the idea of registering and tracking Muslims in the United States. Consider, for example, what is fellow Republicans had to say.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush called it "abhorrent." Florida Sen. Marco Rubio said the idea was "unnecessary" and not something Americans would support. And Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, said, "I'm not a fan of government registries of American citizens."

He told reporters in Iowa, "The First Amendment protects religious liberty, and I've spent the past several decades defending the religious liberty of every American."

Ohio Gov. John Kasich said requiring people to register with the federal government because of their religion "strikes against all that we have believed in our nation's history."

Ben Carson said the U.S. should have a database on "every foreigner who comes into this country," but he rejected the idea of tracking U.S. citizens based on their religion.

Trump initially appeared to endorse the idea of a mandatory database while campaigning in Iowa late last week. A reporter asked about the prospect of such a database and whether Muslims would be required to be registered. In a video posted by the network, Trump said, "They have to be."

Asked whether Muslims would have to register at mosques, Mr. Trump said: "Different places. You sign up at different places. But it's all about management."

Mr. Trump later said he had trouble hearing the reporter's questions, but still he didn't reject the idea of a general registry for Muslims in this country.

His comments followed the attacks in Paris that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds more. The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility, prompting calls for new restrictions on refugees fleeing war-torn Syria, including from Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner.

Civil liberties experts told the Associated Press that a database for Muslims would be unconstitutional on several counts, while the libertarian Cato Institute's Ilya Shapiro said the idea also violates basic privacy and liberty rights.

When Mr. Trump was pressed further about a Muslim database by NBC, he told reporters he "never responded" to the questions and then ignored follow-ups about his remarks to NBC.

If a candidate expresses these kinds of ideas on the campaign trail, we can only wonder how he might react in the pressure-packed volatile situations our president faces every day.

Our government is charged above everything else with enforcing our Constitution and the basic rights it protects. We need to be able to trust our leaders to honor that duty and that's hard to do when a presidential wannabe endorses a plan that involves infringement on the civil rights of one group or another.

"One of the hallmarks of America is that we treat everybody the same," Mr. Carson said. "If we're just going to pick out a particular group of people based on their religion, based on their race, based on some other thing, that's setting a pretty dangerous precedent."