Obama Administration claims refugee vetting is rigorous

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Thousands of supporters showed up Saturday for a Donald Trump campaign event. After making an entrance to the song "Sweet Home Alabama," Trump kicked off with a promise...
"We're going to have a lot of fun and then I'm getting you home to those football games," said Trump.

Then Trump offered a serious message about security. He clarified comments made earlier this week about a Muslim database.

"I want surveillance of certain mosques. Okay? If that's okay," Trump told the crowd.

"I want surveillance," Trump continued. "I will absolutely take database on the people coming in from Syria if we can't stop it, but we're going to. And if I win, I've made it known. If I win, they're going back. We can't have them."

Trump also touted his immigration plan.

"We have to establish borders and we have to build a wall," Trump said.

"Build that wall! Build that wall!" cheered supporters.

It's a message resonating with Alabama voters.

"I am all for trump for President," said Rachel Turner, who attended the rally. "I like what he says."
We also found democrats cheering in support.

"He's different," said Kevin Johnson. "He's not a politician. I'm just curious what it would be like with him, even though everyone tells me I shouldn't."

Even Alabamians not usually interested in politics showed up.

"This is my first political rally," said Jonathan Teesdale. "I wouldn't come to any political rally really if it wasn't Trump, I wouldn't come. I didn't vote in the last election but I plan on voting this election."

Not everyone inside the BJCC was a supporter. A couple of protesters made their way inside. When Trump heard them yelling from the crowd, he threw them out.

"Get him the hell out of here, will you please?" yelled Trump. "Get him out of here. Throw him out!"

When members of the media turned their cameras to capture the protester resisting, Trump berated them.

Carson would support monitoring of 'anti-American' groups
COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson said Saturday that he wants to expand the government's surveillance operations aimed at potential terrorist threats, even beyond tracking American Muslims as rival Donald Trump has suggested.

Carson, who has joined Trump atop GOP presidential preference polls, did not delve into constitutional questions about whether expanding government surveillance activities would violate First Amendment protections.

"What I have said is that I would be in favor of monitoring a mosque or any church or any organization or any school or any press corps where there was a lot of radicalization and things that were anti-American," Carson told reporters during an appearance at a justice forum in South Carolina. He did not expound on just how an administration would determine what constitutes "radicalization" or "anti-American."

Carson added that funding for FBI surveillance activities should be increased. He said the agency currently can only afford to monitor "30 to 60 people," numbers he did not explain before aides steered him away from reporters.

Among those seeking the GOP nomination, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush called the prospect of a registry "abhorrent." Florida Sen. Marco Rubio said the idea was "unnecessary" and not something Americans would support. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, who has largely avoided criticizing Trump throughout the 2016 campaign, said, "I'm not a fan of government registries of American citizens."

The first reference to a database came in a Trump interview with Yahoo News published Thursday. When asked about requiring Muslims to register in a database or carry a form of special identification noting their religion, Trump said, "We're going to have to look at a lot of things very closely."

Trump was pressed on the idea of a registry by an NBC News reporter Thursday evening while the candidate campaigned in Iowa. Asked if there should be a database system for tracking Muslims in the United States, Trump said, "There should be a lot of systems, beyond databases." The reporter asked if that was something Trump would put in place as president. Trump replied: "I would certainly implement that. Absolutely."

Civil liberties experts said a database for Muslims would be unconstitutional on several counts. The libertarian Cato Institute's Ilya Shapiro said the idea violates basic privacy and liberty rights.

Administration assures governors refugee vetting is rigorous
DOUGLASS K. DANIEL, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration is assuring governors that refugees who come to the United States in its resettlement program undergo a "rigorous security vetting process," particularly if they are fleeing from Syria.

"In short, the security vetting for this population — the most vulnerable of individuals — is extraordinarily thorough and comprehensive," Secretary of State John Kerry and Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson write in letters sent to all state and territorial governors and to the mayor of Washington. D.C.

After last week's attacks in Paris by the Islamic State, several governors vowed to block efforts to resettle Syrian refugees in the U.S. for fear their ranks would be infiltrated by IS militants planning a domestic attack. In the House, lawmakers voted overwhelmingly to erect high hurdles for Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

The administration countered that the vetting process was thorough and could take nearly three years. President Barack Obama has said the U.S. will remain a welcoming place for refugees from around the world.

In their letters to governors, Kerry and Johnson said the vetting process is multi-layered and intensive and involves multiple law enforcement, national security and intelligence agencies and includes even more precautions for Syrian refugees. A copy of the letter addressed to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and dated Friday was obtained Saturday by The Associated Press.

Noting that more than 4 million people have fled Syria, the American officials say some of the closest U.S. allies and other nations are pledging to take in Syrian refugees. They say the plan to bring at least 10,000 to the U.S. this fiscal year "represents a modest commitment by our government." Most of the refugees, they add, are families, victims of torture and children.

A refugee applicant cannot be approved for travel and admission to the U.S. until all required security checks have been completed and cleared, according to the letter to Cuomo. The vetting process includes:

—An interview with the U.N. high commissioner for refugees to determine if the applicant meets the definition of refugee and to see if any "red flags" would render the applicant ineligible.

—A referral by the UNHCR to the U.S., after which a resettlement support center contracted by the State Department conducts interviews, collects documents and initiates a security check conducted by the U.S. government.

—A biographic check conducted by the State Department that includes checking the applicant against names in the various law enforcement and intelligence databases and watch lists.

—A referral to U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services at the Homeland Security Department, which oversees refugee status interviews and additional security vetting with a focus on security checks. Fingerprints are collected from those ages 14 to 79 and screened against records held by the FBI, the Homeland Security Department and the Defense Department.

—Personal refugee status interviews conducted by highly trained refugee officers of Citizen and Immigration Services, who have also received special training regarding Syrian refugees.

—A vetting by U.S. Customs and Border Protection before the applicant arrives at a port of entry, followed by additional background checks upon arrival.

—A determination of an appropriate resettlement site in the U.S. by the State Department and the Health and Human Services Department.

"With these measures in place, we believe that we are able to both protect the American people and maintain this nation's long-standing position as the world's beacon of hope and freedom," Kerry and Johnson write.