

**Chairman Johnson Opening Statement**  
**“Canada’s Fast-Track Refugee Plan: Unanswered Questions and Implications for U.S. National Security”**

**Wednesday, February 3, 2016**

*As submitted for the record:*

Good morning and welcome.

We have convened this hearing to learn more about Canada’s plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016 and to better understand the implications of this ambitious effort for U.S. national security.

From 2005 to 2014, the Canadian government, on average, resettled around 20,000 total refugees each year. During its federal election last year, admitting more Syrian refugees became a campaign issue, with Justin Trudeau, now the prime minister, pledging to admit 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by year’s end. Despite concerns from numerous security experts and the international organizations involved in the resettlement process, Prime Minister Trudeau continues moving forward to meet this self-imposed deadline, which has now been delayed slightly, to the end of this month.

In November, we examined the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program to understand how the United States plans to bring in an additional 10,000 Syrian refugees by the end of fiscal year 2016. At that hearing, we learned that it takes 18 to 24 months to vet each refugee and that many are not cleared by our vetting process. We also learned that information necessary to fully vet Syrian refugees is far from complete, creating even greater concern regarding Canada’s most recent plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in a much shorter time.

In March and April 2015, this committee heard testimony from various security and law enforcement experts regarding the porous nature of the U.S.-Canada border. Specifically, witnesses testified that people who get into Canada most likely will be able to enter the United States. For these reasons, our hearing today seeks to understand the implications of Canada’s expedited security screening as it relates to U.S. national security interests.

While it is important to assist those in need of protection, we must ensure that we and our northern neighbor do not circumvent the security checks that are in place. We also must understand shortcomings in the current vetting process. At this committee’s annual hearing to assess threats to the homeland, National Counterterrorism Center Director Nick Rasmussen noted that “when you screen and vet, you screen and vet against available intelligence holdings” and that “the intelligence picture we have of [the Syrian] conflict zone is not as rich as we would like it to be.” Therefore, while both the United States and Canada may have a system that ensures that all databases are reviewed during the vetting process, you can only review against the information you have.

I thank all the witnesses, some of whom have traveled from Canada, to shed light on this serious matter, and I look forward to your testimony.