

Guns fact check: Obama flubs ATF duties, Trump talks big

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's executive actions on guns have sparked renewed debate about how far the government should go in limiting gun sales. Obama took questions in a televised town hall meeting Thursday night, while leading Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump weighed in on the debate at a rally in New Hampshire.

A look at some of their comments and how they compare with the facts:

OBAMA: The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives is "a law enforcement agency working under the FBI that is doing enormous work in going after criminals and drug cartels, and have a pretty dangerous job, so it's not as if doing background checks or auditing gun sales is all that they're doing."

THE FACTS: Obama got his own administration's organizational chart wrong. The agency is actually a component of the Justice Department whose top official reports to the attorney general, just like the FBI. Background checks aren't done by ATF, but are conducted by the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

While ATF agents can inspect federally licensed gun dealers' records once every 12 months, the reality is that inspections are much rarer. The agency's 629 inspectors were only able to look at 10,429 of the more than 141,000 dealers — roughly 7 percent — in 2014.

OBAMA: "I think it's useful to keep in mind, I've been, now, president for over seven years, and gun sales don't seem to have suffered during that time. They've, they've gone up. I've been very good for gun manufacturers."

THE FACTS: He's right on this point. While gun sales data aren't



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

As tears flow from his eyes, President Barack Obama speaks in the East Room of the White House in Washington on Tuesday about steps his administration is taking to reduce gun violence.

specifically available, ATF does track gun manufacturing figures and noted in its 2015 firearms commerce report that production nearly doubled from 2010 through 2013, from 5.4 million weapons to 10.8 million.

The number of FBI firearms background checks has also steadily risen since Obama took office. Black Friday 2015 set a record for background check requests in a single day when the agency processed 185,345 of them.

OBAMA: "One of the most frustrating things that I hear is when people say, who are opposed to any further laws, why don't you just enforce the laws that are on the books? And those very same members of Congress then cut ... ATF budgets to make it impossible to enforce the law."

THE FACTS: The ATF budget has

actually grown slightly under Obama. In 2008, before he took office, the agency had a budget of just under \$1 billion. Since then, the administration has requested about \$1.1 billion annually, and Congress has generally approved it. The lone exception was 2013, when the president asked for \$1.15 billion and Congress trimmed that to \$1.07 billion.

TRUMP: "I will get rid of gun-free zones on schools ... and on military bases, my first day, it gets signed, OK? My first day."

THE FACTS: Trump can't possibly deliver on that pledge. The Gun-Free School Zones Act is a federal law that was passed in 1990 and signed by then-President George H.W. Bush. Congress would have to overturn the 25-year-old statute to make the change he advocates.

FBI says refugees used social media to plan fight in Syria

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — An Iraqi man bragged about his experience fighting in Syria and the skills he developed as a teenage insurgent as he urged a fellow Iraqi refugee in the U.S. to join him in what both hoped would be martyrdom, according to documents filed in federal court.

Aws Mohammed Younis Al-Jayab, 23, of Sacramento, described his experience fighting against Syrian government soldiers in heroic terms and promised in 2013 he would train Omar Faraj Saeed Al Hardan, of Houston, in how to use weapons and sneak into Syria to join the fight, according to an FBI affidavit unsealed in federal court in Sacramento.

The two Iraqi-born Palestinians used social media to discuss their plans, according to federal authorities. The communications provided the link that led to terrorism-related charges against the men this week.

Al-Jayab faces up to eight years in prison on charges of traveling to Syria to fight in late 2013 and early 2014 and lying to U.S. authorities about his travels. Al Hardan faces up to 25 years in prison and is charged with attempting to provide material support for terrorists.

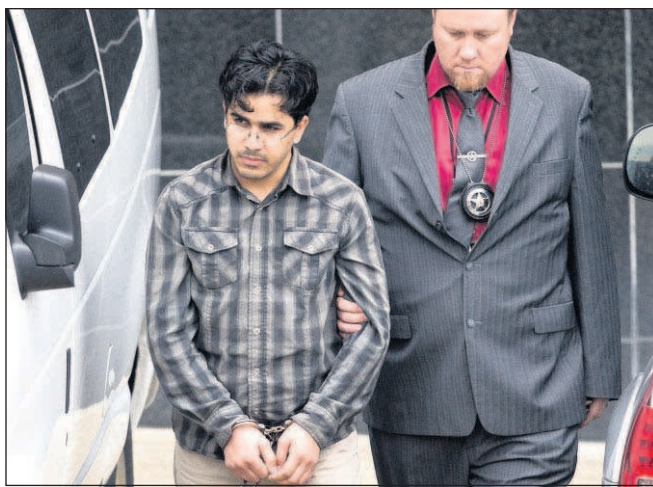
Al-Jayab's attorney on Friday criticized U.S. politicians who he said "have grossly mischaracterized the nature and scope of this case" to tie it to the debate over whether the United States is doing enough to screen refugees.

"There is no threat that this man poses or no indication that he's engaged in any activity since his return two years ago. The only activities that were interrupted were his studies and his work," defense attorney Ben Galloway said.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Carolyn Delaney ordered him held without bail.

It's not clear how Al-Jayab and Al Hardan met online, although the FBI affidavit describes at least one apparently mutual acquaintance.

The criminal complaint against Al-Jayab recounts a series of communications with different people, none of whom is identified. One called "Individual I" is Al Hardan, according to Lauren Horwood, a spokeswoman for the U.S. attorney in Sacramento.



AP Photo/Bob Levey

Omar Faraj Saeed Al Hardan, left, is escorted by U.S. Marshals from the Bob Casey Federal Courthouse on Friday in Houston.

Federal authorities say Al-Jayab emigrated from Syria to the United States as a refugee in October 2012, living in Tucson, Arizona, and Milwaukee until November 2013, when he went back overseas to fight.

He returned to the United States in January 2014 and lived in Sacramento. He has been a computer science major at a Sacramento college since last fall.

Al-Jayab and Al Hardan communicated in April 2013, and Al Hardan expressed interest in fighting in Syria.

"O God, grant us martyrdom for your sake while engaged in fighting and not retreating; a martyrdom that would make you satisfied with us," Al-Jayab wrote to Al Hardan, according to court documents.

Al-Jayab said he had already fought in Syria, starting when he turned 16, according to messages between the two men quoted in court documents. He promised to provide weapons training to Al Hardan and advised him on how he would be assigned to the battlefield once he arrived in Syria.

Authorities say Al-Jayab fought twice in Syria, including with a group later affiliated with Islamic State between November 2013 and January 2014. He told authorities he had traveled to Turkey to visit his grandmother, which prosecutors say was a lie that could send him to prison.

Court documents rely heavily on Al-Jayab's social media communication, much of which is in Arabic, travel records and Internet IP addresses. Prosecutors did not provide additional information.

In several messages, Al-Jayab criticized Islamic State for killing Muslims,

although he later described fighting alongside the group.

"If it weren't for the State's bloodletting, I would have been the first one to join it," he said, according to the FBI.

Al Hardan, 24, appeared in a Houston federal court Friday. Prosecutors charged him with attempting to support the Islamic State and accused him of providing

'O God, grant us martyrdom for your sake.'

— **Aws Younis Al-Jarab**, alleged terrorist

resources to the group beginning around May 2014. Court documents did not provide specifics about the allegations.

Al Hardan told the judge he lives in a Houston-area apartment, is married and has a child. Al Hardan's brother said his sibling told him Friday in a telephone call from the Federal Detention Center in Houston that he is innocent of the charges.

Saeed Faraj Saeed Al Hardan of Houston said their family had always felt that "ISIS is no good" and "ISIS is not Muslim."

Federal officials say two of Al-Jayab's brothers in Milwaukee and a cousin in California also were arrested but those arrests are not related to national security.

REFUGE: Ward said he is 'keeping all options open'

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that they have no intention of honoring the sheriff's request to leave. Because of that, there are no planned meetings or calls at this time," Ward said.

But Ward said he is "keeping all options open."

Bundy's group — calling itself Citizens for Constitutional Freedom — comes from as far away as Arizona and Michigan.

Bundy's protest at the refuge is a continuation of long-running arguments that federal policies for management of public lands in the West are harming ranchers and other locals. Bundy is the son of Cliven Bundy, a Nevada rancher who in 2014 was at the center of a tense standoff with federal officials over grazing rights.

Ammon Bundy has been demanding that federal land in Oregon's Harney County

be turned over to local residents to be managed.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Thursday called the occupation of the wildlife refuge "unlawful" and said it had to end.

"It was instigated by outsiders whose tactics we Oregonians don't agree with. Those individuals illegally occupying the Malheur Wildlife Refuge need to decamp immediately and be held accountable," she said.

Federal, state and local law authorities have been closely monitoring the situation at the refuge but have so far taken no action against Bundy and his followers, apparently to avoid a confrontation. Ward has been the most visible law enforcement authority during the occupation, and his strategy so far has been to try to show Bundy that locals oppose the occupation and want them to leave.

CARTY: Construction expected to be back to full strength in few weeks

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by Standard & Poor's earlier that year.

Another agency, Moody's Investor Service, also downgraded its rating of Abengoa from B1 to B2, with a stable outlook.

"It seemed to us there were significant questions," said John Stephens, a Portland lawyer representing Calpine.

The PUC ultimately denied the petition for declaratory ruling, and PGE moved forward with Abengoa. PGE spokesman Steve Corson said the company closely evaluated all bids, as well as an independent evaluator, and decided Abengoa had provided appropriate assurances.

"We felt comfortable, the independent evaluator felt comfortable, and the PUC had also affirmed we used an appropriate process in evaluating the bidding," Corson said.

There is no such thing as a risk-free project, Corson said, especially on a 440-megawatt, \$514 million power plant. PGE did have a performance bond worth \$145.6 million through Liberty Mutual and Zurich North America.

Corson said they are now working with those sureties to update the construction cost and schedule.

"Part of our job is to mitigate risk by putting in appropriate financial safeguards, and that's what we did," Corson said.

Construction was already about 75 percent finished at Carty when Abeinsa began turning approximately 500 workers away from the site on Dec. 14. Four days later, PGE ruled Abeinsa in default of its contract and took over the site.

Since then, construction has gradually ramped back up and Corson said they expect to be back to full strength in the next few weeks.

"We're pleased to have the project back underway," he said. "We remain convinced this will be a very valuable and reliable resource for our customers moving forward."

Carty was expected to come online in mid-2016, though that could change. PGE says it plans to provide an update on the work schedule in February.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

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The Oregon Public Utility Commission designated CenturyLink as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier within its service area for universal service purposes. CenturyLink's basic local service rates for residential voice lines are \$14.48-\$16.55 per month and business services are \$20.31-\$27.25 per month. Specific rates will be provided upon request.

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