



President Donald Trump signs an executive order on extreme vetting during an event at the Pentagon in Washington, Friday.

## Trump orders strict new refugee screening, citing terrorists

By KEN THOMAS  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Setting a hard-line tone on national security, President Donald Trump on Friday ordered strict new screening for refugees to keep “radical Islamic terrorists” out of the United States and alternated tough talk with kind words in his diplomatic standoff with Mexico.

Trump traveled to the Pentagon where he joined Defense Secretary James Mattis for the signing of an executive action to bring sweeping changes to the nation’s refugee policies and put in motion his plans to build up the nation’s military. “We want to ensure that we are not admitting into our country the very threats our soldiers are fighting overseas,” he said. “We only want to admit those into our country who will support our country and love deeply our people.”

During his election campaign against Hillary Clinton, Trump pledged to put in place “extreme vetting” procedures to screen people coming to the U.S. from countries with terrorism ties. The White House did not immediately release details on the order Trump signed, but a draft of the order called for suspending the issuing of visas to people from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen for at least 30 days.

Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) was among the critics of the action, calling it a “smokescreen for religious discrimination” which goes against U.S. values and constitutional principles.

“Widows and orphans are not threats to our national security,” Merkley said in a statement. “Muslim Iraqi interpreters put their lives at risk and have saved the lives of innumerable American service members. They have proven their loyalty. The true threat to our national security is surrendering the American values we stand for on the world stage and allowing ISIS to recruit more supporters through the false narrative that America is at war with Islam.”

Joined earlier in the day at the White House by British Prime Minister Theresa May, Trump reaffirmed the United States’ “special relationship” with Great Britain.

But he was also asked about more contentious issues, including his recent statements that torture “does work” in prying information out of terror suspects. Giving ground, he said his defense secretary’s opposition would override his own belief. Hours later he stood at the Pentagon as Mattis, the retired general, was sworn in as the military’s chief.

Trump was also pressed on whether he would revert back to Bush-era use of torture, in the news since The Associated Press and other news organizations obtained copies of a draft executive order signaling sweeping changes to U.S. interrogation and detention policy.

Trump said he would defer to the views of Mattis, who has questioned the effectiveness of such practices as waterboarding, which simulates drowning.

“He has stated publicly that he does not necessarily believe in torture or waterboarding, or however you want to define it. ... I don’t necessarily agree. But I would tell you that he will override because I’m giving

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— Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore.

him that power. He’s an expert,” Trump said.

The draft order, which the White House said was not official, also would reverse Obama’s effort to close the military detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba — a place Trump has said he wants to fill up “with bad dudes.”

The draft also requests recommendations on whether the U.S. should reopen CIA detention facilities outside the United States. Critics said the clandestine sites have marred America’s image on the world stage.

Trump held firm Friday on another controversy — trade and illegal immigration from Mexico. He told reporters at a joint news conference with May that he had a “very good call” with Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto earlier in the day, but he reaffirmed his belief that Mexico has “outnegotiated and beat us to a pulp” on trade — and that would change.

“We’re no longer going to be the country that doesn’t know what it’s doing,” he declared a day after the Mexican leader canceled his visit to Washington in response to Trump’s plans to build a border wall and have Mexico pay for it.

By PAUL J. WEBER  
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — President Donald Trump on Friday pressed his widely debunked claims of massive voter fraud by encouraging the work of a Texas man who has offered no evidence to support his claim that millions of people illegally voted in the 2016 election.

Trump tweeted: “Look forward to seeing the final results of VoteStand. Gregg Phillips and crew say at least 3,000,000 votes were illegal. We must do better!”

The tweet came less than an hour after a CNN interview with Phillips, who has refused to substantiate his claims since he made them days after the November election.

Phillips tweeted that a Houston-based group, True the Vote, “will lead the analysis” of widespread voter fraud. But the founder of that group said Friday it has not confirmed that millions voted illegally.

Here’s more about the man Trump is cheering on, and about True the Vote.

### WHO IS PHILLIPS?

Phillips is a former Texas state official whose brief stint as deputy executive director

at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission drew media scrutiny over privatization efforts. He went on to found AutoGov, a health care software contractor whose clients include state governments, and created a mobile app called VoteStand that allows people to report suspicious voting activity.



Phillips

Phillips also previously worked as a state health official in Mississippi, resigning under fire from lawmakers. A state panel concluded that he stepped down as executive director of the Mississippi’s Department of Human Services on the same day he went to work for a company that he had given a state contract.

“Mr. Phillips’s actions create the appearance of impropriety, facilitating an erosion of the public trust,” according to the panel’s 1995 report.

After the 2016 election, Phillips tweeted that his “completed analysis” of voter registrations concluded that the “number of non-citizen votes

exceeded 3 million.” He has rebuffed media requests for evidence, saying since Nov. 15 that he would release it broadly to the public, but he hasn’t. He suggested Friday that he might do so in a few more months.

Upset that Democrat Hillary Clinton defeated him in the popular vote, Trump has repeatedly blamed that result on illegally cast or counted votes but offered no substantiation. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have completed their election results with no reports of the kind of widespread fraud that Trump alleges.

### WHAT ABOUT TRUE THE VOTE?

Phillips is a board member of True the Vote, a conservative group that has challenged the validity of voter rolls in numerous states. Tax records from 2014 show the group reported raising nearly \$1.2 million and having an estimated 50,000 volunteers.

It was founded by Catherine Engelbrecht, who also started the tea party group the King Street Patriots.

That organization drew national attention in 2010 after sending hundreds of observers to Houston-area polling stations, spurring complaints of intimidation from minority rights groups.

Engelbrecht said Friday that she believes millions of people illegally voted in the last election but also acknowledged “there is no way to confirm that at this point.” She said the group still lacks voter files from many states but hopes to begin releasing findings by late spring.

King Street Patriots is in a legal battle over Democratic efforts to release the identity of its donors. The case is set to go before the Texas Supreme Court next month.

### WHAT’S NEXT?

White House press secretary Sean Spicer said this week that Trump will take executive action to launch an investigation into voting fraud. The Republican who leads the House Oversight Committee, Rep. Jason Chaffetz of Utah, said he’s seen no evidence of fraud in the 2016 election and his committee will not investigate it. Chaffetz, however, said Trump is free to order the Justice Department to investigate the issue.

## BRIEFLY

### Anti-abortion groups hold triumphant rally after Obama years

WASHINGTON (AP) — The politically ascendant anti-abortion movement gathered Friday for a triumphant rally on the National Mall, rejoicing at the end of an eight-year presidency that participants said was dismissive of their views.

Vice President Mike Pence told the crowd at the March for Life that anti-abortion policies were a top priority of the new administration, and President Donald Trump tweeted that the rally had his “full support.”

The March for Life is held every year in Washington to mark the anniversary of the 1973 Supreme Court decision

legalizing abortion. While no official crowd estimates were available, the turnout was clearly larger than in recent years, when abortion opponents had less political clout. Many thousands huddled in the shadow of the Washington Monument and stood in long lines outside security checkpoints made necessary by Pence’s appearance.

“We’ve come to a historic moment in the cause for life,” said Pence, the first vice president to address the rally. “Life is winning in America.”

Pence said ending taxpayer-funded abortion

and choosing a Supreme Court justice in the mold of the late Antonin Scalia — a conservative Catholic who opposed abortion — are among the administration’s most important goals.

### Economic growth slowed in Q4

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy lost momentum in the final three months of 2016 as a downturn in exports temporarily depressed activity. But there were hopeful signs in housing and business investment that the economy will

rebound in the coming months.

The gross domestic product grew at an annual rate of just 1.9 percent in the October-December period, a slowdown from 3.5 percent growth in the third quarter, the Commerce Department reported Friday.

For all of 2016, the economy grew 1.6 percent. It was the worst showing in five years since a similar 1.6 percent gain in 2011. GDP grew 2.6 percent in 2015, and since the recession ended in mid-2009, growth has averaged a weak 2.1 percent.

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