

US House passes bill to block Syrian refugees, require more vetting

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Washington: US House of Representatives on Thursday overwhelmingly approved a bill that would block Syrian and Iraqi refugees from entering the US unless they pass strict background checks.

The measure was approved on a vote of 289 to 137, with 47 of US President Barack Obama's 188 fellow Democrats breaking with the White House to endorse the bill.

The White House issued a veto threat on Wednesday and Obama said that Republicans' concern about the current US vetting system for refugees "doesn't jibe with reality".

The bill would hold obliged heads of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Homeland Security as well as national intelligence agencies to certify to the Congress that each Iraqi and Syrian refugee let into the United States is not a security threat.

The bill still has to sail through the Senate before being sent to Obama. Senate minority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat from Nevada, had already pledged that the bill would not be passed in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Despite Senate Democrats' objection, the fate of the bill remained uncertain in the Senate, as objection to receiving Syrian refugees prevailed in the wake of Paris attacks, where at least 129 were killed and more than 350 were wounded.

According to a new poll by Bloomberg released on Wednesday, 53 percent of US adults say the Obama administration should not continue a program announced earlier this year to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian refugees.

It remained unknown how many Senate Democrats would join their 47 House fellow Democrats to give the green light to the bill under the pressure of their constituencies.

Meanwhile, the White House was scrambling to persuade Democratic lawmakers to keep the number of Democratic defections low in order to sustain Obama's veto in case the bill passes in the Congress.

However, even if the bill gets vetoed, the fight surrounding the Syrian refugee issue is not expected to be solved soon. Several Republican lawmakers had already indicated that they would tie the issue to a must-pass December budget measure.

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