

GOP governors threaten to halt Syrian refugee resettlement in their states

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New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez (left) participates in a panel discussion as Maryland Governor Larry Hogan looks on during the Republican Governors Association annual conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, Nov. 18, 2015. Photo: AP/Chase Stevens

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — Defiant Republican governors on Wednesday demanded the Obama administration suspend plans to resettle thousands of Syrian refugees in their states. They claimed it would be all but impossible to identify any terrorists who might be hidden among the refugees. Furthermore, they said, it would be particularly risky to admit the refugees so soon after last week's deadly attacks in Paris, France.

Last Friday's attacks in Paris were carried out by the Islamic State group, also known as ISIS. They left 129 people dead and hundreds wounded.

Despite early reports, none of the suspects in the Paris attacks has been identified as a Syrian refugee. The German interior minister says that a Syrian migrant passport found at the scene is likely a fake. Nonetheless, the attacks have hardened opposition to accepting the many refugees from Syria who are fleeing that country's violent civil war.

U.S., France Bombs Aiding Syrian Rebels

Both the U.S. and France are currently engaged in a bombing campaign in Syria. The two countries are supporting rebels seeking to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The Islamic State group is involved in the fighting in Syria as well, and now controls parts of the country. That group is trying to establish a country governed under Islamic law in Iraq and Syria.

Some survivors of the Paris attacks claimed the terrorists said France was being punished for its involvement in the Syrian bombing campaign. Some in the U.S. fear that the Islamic State group might be planning to strike here as well, and that its fighters could slip in with legitimate Syrian refugees.

State leaders from New Mexico to Michigan pleaded with the president to suspend the refugee program — at least temporarily. Others, including Republican governors from Texas and Indiana, claimed the legal authority to block the federal resettlement efforts on their own.

"We have the independent authority to completely shut down these refugee relocation programs," Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared. "The states are saying we are not going to accept any more of these refugees until the United States comes up with an effective vetting program."

Despite the tough talk, it may not be that easy for states to turn away the refugees.

U.S. Government Controls Refugee Resettlement

The Refugee Act of 1980 dictates that refugee resettlement within the United States is managed by the federal government. State refugee coordinators are consulted by the federal government and the nine refugee resettlement agencies that have contracts with the government. However, that consultation is largely to ensure the refugees are settled in cities with adequate jobs, housing and social services.

Individual states do not have the legal authority to block refugee placement.

Nonetheless, that did not stop Indiana Governor Mike Pence from acting on his own. This week he issued an executive order blocking federal money needed to administer the program.

The program is designed to work "on a collaborative basis between the federal government and states," Pence declared. "What we've essentially said is, 'We're not collaborating with you.'"

Pence encouraged President Barack Obama to reconsider his plan to veto legislation just passed by the House of Representatives. The proposed legislation would institute new screening requirements that would have to be met before Syrian and Iraqi refugees would be allowed into the United States.

Refugee Screening Process Can Take Years

Roughly 2,200 Syrian refugees have been allowed in over the last four years. The president has a goal of bringing 10,000 more Syrian refugees to the U.S. over the next year.

Such refugees currently go through a comprehensive screening process that can take as long as three years. The House bill would add a requirement for the Homeland Security secretary, along with the head of the FBI and the director of National Intelligence, to certify that each refugee being admitted poses no security threat.

The change "would provide no meaningful additional security for the American people," the White House said. Instead, it would serve "only to create significant delays and obstacles in the fulfillment of a vital program that satisfies both humanitarian and national security objectives."

It is unclear whether the bill would be enough to satisfy Republican governors even if it becomes law.

"If you really care about those people in Syria, why not take and put the resources in Syria instead of bringing hundreds of thousands of Syrians here?" South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley asked.

Governor Calls For Kinder, Gentler Approach

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder encouraged other Republican governors to maintain a welcoming tone in the refugee debate. Some Republicans fear that their party's opposition to the president's plan includes traces of bigotry.

Snyder, for example, condemned Republicans who suggested that only Christian Syrians be allowed into the United States.

"I don't think that line's ever been drawn in our country's history. And I don't think that'd be an appropriate line to draw," he said.

However, Snyder has joined other Republican governors in urging the president to "pause" the resettlement program until security concerns are addressed.

"I don't want to assume that there's a problem at this point. I just want to make sure we're doing the appropriate reviews," Snyder said. "It shouldn't be a real long pause."

Quiz

- 1 Which sentence from the article BEST supports the idea that the Republican governors are "defiant," as described in the opening sentence?
- (A) State leaders from New Mexico to Michigan pleaded with the president to suspend the refugee program — at least temporarily.
 - (B) Others, including Republican governors from Texas and Indiana, claimed the legal authority to block the federal resettlement efforts on their own.
 - (C) It is unclear whether the bill would be enough to satisfy Republican governors even if it becomes law.
 - (D) However, Snyder has joined other Republican governors in urging the president to "pause" the resettlement program until security concerns are addressed.
- 2 Which of these paragraphs from the article represents a shift in the article's development?
- (A) Both the U.S. and France are currently engaged in a bombing campaign in Syria. The two countries are supporting rebels seeking to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The Islamic State group is involved in the fighting in Syria as well, and now controls parts of the country. That group is trying to establish a country governed under Islamic law in Iraq and Syria.
 - (B) Pence encouraged President Barack Obama to reconsider his plan to veto legislation just passed by the House of Representatives. The proposed legislation would institute new screening requirements that would have to be met before Syrian and Iraqi refugees would be allowed into the United States.
 - (C) State leaders from New Mexico to Michigan pleaded with the president to suspend the refugee program — at least temporarily. Others, including Republican governors from Texas and Indiana, claimed the legal authority to block the federal resettlement efforts on their own.
 - (D) Such refugees currently go through a comprehensive screening process that can take as long as three years. The House bill would add a requirement for the Homeland Security secretary, along with the head of the FBI and the director of National Intelligence, to certify that each refugee being admitted poses no security threat.

- 3 What is the main purpose of the section "Refugee Screening Process Can Take Years"?
- (A) to point out the potential gaps in the current refugee screening process and to propose potential solutions
 - (B) to provide insight into the difficult process refugees must go through and to promote a sense of empathy
 - (C) to advocate for needed changes in the refugee screening process in the United States by making a logical appeal
 - (D) to explain the current screening process for refugees coming to the United States and to provide the federal government's perspective
- 4 What purpose does the final section of the article, "Governor Calls For Kinder, Gentler Approach," serve?
- (A) It provides insightful commentary about the causes of the refugee issue.
 - (B) It introduces an alternative to the two opposing perspectives presented earlier.
 - (C) It makes a prediction about the outcome of the conflict over refugees.
 - (D) It examines the possible effects of the refugee crisis on the future of the United States.