Administration Announces It Will Accept At Least 10,000 Additional Syrian Refugees During FY 2016; Administration Announces Changes To Visa Waiver Program

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Legislative Activity

Administration Announces It Will Accept At Least 10,000 Additional Syrian Refugees During FY 2016

This week, the Administration announced it would accept up to 10,000 additional refugees fleeing conflict in Syria during the next fiscal year. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina), Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State Foreign Operations, has said he would support emergency funds to support these increased numbers.

However, House Homeland Security Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas) cautioned that he could not support the Administration’s proposal until those people could be properly vetted. While he acknowledged the epic proportions of the humanitarian crisis in a Sunday interview with ABC’s George Stephanopoulos, Chairman McCaul said that Homeland Security and intelligence officials have testified that the necessary vetting systems are not in place on the ground in Syria, cautioning that ISIL has threatened to use the refugee crisis to infiltrate the West.

The President’s announcement came as countries in Europe faced increased pressure from thousands of displaced people seeking to escape continued fighting in Syria, as well as in Iraq and Libya. The Administration is reportedly also beginning to discuss formal expansion of the U.S. refugee resettlement program beyond 70,000 people annually with lawmakers.

This Week’s Hearings:

- Monday, September 14: The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee will hold a field hearing titled “All Hands on Deck: Working Together to End the Trafficking and Abuse of Prescription Opioids, Heroin, and Fentanyl.”

- Wednesday, September 16: The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee will hold a hearing titled “A Review of Regulatory Reform Proposals.”

- Wednesday, September 16: The Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing titled “Reforming the Electronic Communications Privacy Act.”

- Thursday, September 17: The House Homeland Security Subcommittees on Counterterrorism and Intelligence and on Transportation Security will hold a joint hearing titled “Safeguarding Our Nation’s Surface Transportation Systems Against Evolving Terrorist Threats.”
Thursday, September 17: The Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a meeting to consider pending legislation and judicial nominations.


Executive Branch Activity

Administration Announces Changes to Visa Waiver Program

On August 6, Jeh Johnson, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), announced the government’s intention to implement a number of additional or revised security criteria for all people participating in the Visa Waiver Program. Under the Visa Waiver Program, citizens of 38 participating countries are permitted to travel to the U.S without a visa for visits of 90 days or less. Partner countries must meet specific criteria in order to become and remain eligible.

Secretary Johnson announced that the changes would apply to both new and current members of the program, and would include requiring the use of e-passports, which contain electronic chips, and the increased use of U.S. federal air marshals on flights from Visa Waiver Program partners to the United States. According to unnamed officials, the Administration’s changes are part of its response to the growing threat of fighters who have traveled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIL and other groups. DHS also plans to undertake a review of all countries participating in the Visa Waiver Program to ensure they are following its requirements.

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