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HOUSE VOTES TO BLOCK OBAMA'S EXECUTIVE ACTION ON IMMIGRATION

By Kristina Peterson and Laura Meckler
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The House Wednesday passed legislation to nullify President Barack Obama's immigration policies, tying the contentious matter to a bill funding Homeland Security and setting up a clash with Democrats who are expected block the measure in the Senate.

The vote was 236-191 for the spending bill after the House easily approved amendments to undo the president's executive actions last year, and to block a program that gives safe harbor to young people brought to the U.S. as children. The latter amendment was adopted only narrowly, with centrist Republicans opposing it as a step too far.

The amendment, which would end a 2012 program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, was approved 218-209, with 26 Republicans voting no, along with all 183 voting Democrats. That was an increase in GOP opposition from the 11 Republicans who opposed a similar measure last summer.

Overall, though, the party was united in its opposition to Mr. Obama's policies. The main amendment would unravel his plan to offer four million illegal immigrants safe harbor from deportation and concentrate deportations on criminals and recent border crossers over those who pose no particular threat.

"This executive overreach is an affront to the rule of law and to the Constitution itself," House Speaker John Boehner (R., Ohio) said on the floor Wednesday, emphasizing Mr. Obama's past statements in which he suggested he didn't have the power to take these actions. The White House says his actions were well-founded in law and consistent with those taken by previous presidents.

Democrats charged that the GOP was jeopardizing national security by attaching immigration amendments to the spending bill, which is needed to continue Homeland Security operations past February.

"For the first time in history they are holding our security hostage to the politics of immigration," said Rep. Steve Israel (D., N.Y.).

GOP leaders split off funding for the agency, which oversees immigration activities, late last year to give Republicans, now that they control both chambers of Congress, a way to challenge the executive action Mr. Obama signed in November shielding millions of illegal immigrants from deportation. Congress funded the rest of the government through September.

House GOP leaders more commonly face resistance from conservatives concerned the party isn't taking a strong enough stance to curb illegal immigration, but in this case several more centrist Republicans objected.

"I don't believe this is the right place to have the immigration debate," said Rep. Jeff Denham (R., Calif.) ahead of the vote. He said House Republicans were burdening Homeland Security funding with a slate of provisions likely to doom its passage in the Senate. "We are overreaching into an area that goes above and beyond what we're trying to accomplish with the Homeland Security bill."

"We have an opportunity here to say not just what we're against but what we're for, and I think we ought to do something affirmative in putting forward the kind of legislation that would allow these young people to stay in the country," said Rep. Mike Coffman (R., Colo.).

The vote sends the measure to the Senate, where approval would require 60 yes votes, and Democrats appear to have the votes needed to stop it. If it were to make it to Mr. Obama's desk, the White House has promised a veto.

Given that, the votes on Wednesday amounted to more of an opportunity for conservatives to vent their anger at Mr. Obama's move to change immigration policy without congressional approval. The question as to how the parties are to agree on a bill funding Homeland Security remained unresolved.

House and Senate Republicans planned to discuss strategy going forward at a retreat in Pennsylvania on Thursday.

Republicans hold 54 seats in the Senate, short of the 60 votes most bills need to clear procedural hurdles. Centrist Senate Democrats have indicated they are unlikely to support the House funding bill if amended to roll back Mr. Obama's immigration plans.

It isn't clear what Senate leaders will do if the House bill stalls in their chamber.

"If we can't pass the House bill, we'd have to come up with an idea of what could pass the Senate," said Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn (R., Texas).

House GOP leaders intend to wait to see how the Senate responds before making their next move in the House, GOP aides and lawmakers said.

It also would end the Obama administration's policy of prioritizing deportation of certain illegal immigrants over others. Supporters say this is a smart way to deploy limited enforcement resources, but some object because the priorities provide a measure of assurance that illegal immigrants who don't fall under the priorities won't be deported.

Under the Obama policy, top priorities include those suspected of terrorism, national security threats, gang members, those convicted of felonies or aggravated felonies, and those apprehended at the border.

At the same time, the House adopted a separate amendment that directs the administration to consider people convicted of offenses involving domestic violence, sexual abuse, child molestation or child exploitation to be top enforcement priorities. Those crimes aren't specifically listed on the Obama priority list but would be included when they are felonies.

Other less contentious amendments drew wider support from Republicans, such as one from Rep. Aaron Schock (R., Ill.) establishing that it is the "sense of Congress" that the government should not divert resources to processing applications aiding illegal immigrants at the expense of those in the U.S. legally and those who have their own immigration applications pending.