**GOP Senator Introduced Bill Targeting UNRWA Refugee Model**

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Republican Senator James Lankford of Oklahoma introduced a bill on Thursday that would demand the UN Relief and Works Agency change its definition of who qualifies as a Palestinian refugee or else permanently lose its annual congressional funding.

The senator's bill, titled the Palestinian Assistance Reform Act, would siphon UNRWA aid "to other entities providing assistance to Palestinians living in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon," unless the organization reforms, the senator said.

Lankford dropped his bill days after the Trump administration announced it would unilaterally end all aid to UNRWA, citing similar reasons.

But an amendment to the typical congressional appropriations model for UNRWA would codify Trump's new policy long after he leaves office, making Lankford's legislation, if it were to pass, far more weighty and permanent than Trump's executive action.

“American assistance to the Palestinians is an important component of our nation’s engagement in the Middle East, and this bill reinforces that reality,” said Lankford in a statement. “We are currently funding an entity that has ensured that a refugee population of several hundreds of thousands 70 years ago has exploded to more than 5 million. This is not sustainable—for American taxpayers, who are asked to finance the welfare of these individuals, for the Palestinians themselves, or for the Israelis."

"UNRWA’s methodology strains regional tensions more each generation as it increases rather than decreases the number of refugees in the region of Jewish Israelis who, by being registered as ‘Palestine refugees’ with UNRWA, may be wrongfully implied as having an internationally sanctioned right to return to Israel," the senator continued. "Clearly, there is an effort to create a narrative."

Washington contributed $364,265,585 to UNRWA in 2017– 36% of the organization's global budget. International powers and the Palestinian Authority have condemned Trump's withdrawal of aid from the UN body, but the president on Thursday told Jewish leaders that his move was a diplomatic ploy to pressure Palestinians to the negotiating table with Israel.