

Bob Goodlatte pushes immigration solution

By [SEUNG MIN KIM](#) | 1/9/14 11:28 PM EST

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) says he sees “no reason” why current undocumented immigrants shouldn’t gain legal status as long as Congress enacts tougher border-security and enforcement measures.

In a Telemundo interview set to air Sunday, Goodlatte addressed the set of immigration principles that Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) said earlier Thursday is expected to be released in the “coming weeks.”

While not delving into specifics of the document, Goodlatte said the principles are meant to show the broader House Republican Conference how all the pieces of immigration reform would fit together and ultimately “galvanize” support among lawmakers.

Though reform has essentially been written off for dead this Congress, Republican leaders in the House have said they want to get an overhaul done and many lawmakers in the chamber are eager to pass a rewrite of current immigration laws.

Goodlatte outlined three pillars of an overhaul – ensuring border enforcement, fixing the legal immigration system and determining a legal status for immigrants already in the country illegally. He stressed that interior enforcement was a major point of focus for Republicans, noting that as much of 40 percent of undocumented immigrants did not cross a border illegally, but overstayed a visa.

“If we can have a way to get [enforcement] up and operating, I see no reason why we can’t also have an agreement that shows how people who are not lawfully here can be able to be lawfully here – able to live here, work here, travel to and from their home country, be able to own a business, pay their taxes,” Goodlatte, a veteran lawmaker who was an immigration lawyer before coming to Congress, said on the Telemundo show “Enfoque,” according to a transcript of the interview.

The principles effort is spearheaded by House GOP leadership, but key Republican lawmakers such as Goodlatte and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart of Florida have been consulted during the drafting stage. It’s not expected to be a long document; Boehner told reporters Thursday that the “standards and principles” would “guide us in a common-sense, step-by-step approach to dealing with immigration.”

While the leadership is taking charge on writing up the principles, other quiet conversations and meetings are occurring among Republican lawmakers who are amenable to immigration reform.

For instance, to that end, California Rep. Jeff Denham hosted a slew of fellow House Republicans in a meeting Wednesday to talk about immigration. During the session, which was attended by about 20 lawmakers, Republican consultant Frank Luntz discussed some polling and

messaging on immigration. Laurene Powell Jobs, the widow of former Apple CEO Steve Jobs, was also at the meeting, Denham's office said.

Goodlatte's committee passed four reform bills last year that each dealt with one different section of the current immigration system. But none addressed the issue of what to do with the estimated 11.7 million undocumented immigrants in the United States.

In an effort separate from the drafting of principles, a small circle of House Republicans, including Diaz-Balart, have been writing a bill that would establish a pathway to legal status for current undocumented immigrants. Though the bill has not been released, it's expected to combine border-security and interior-enforcement triggers with a legalization track, as well as some sort of probationary period for immigrants on the path.

Another concern among Republicans is ensuring that President Barack Obama – who has repeatedly rankled the GOP by making changes to the health care law, such as a delay of Obamacare's mandate for employers he issued last summer – actually enforces whatever laws that Congress may write.

Republicans are trying to work on solutions to address that issue. For instance, Goodlatte told Telemundo that one way to remove some discretion from the administration is that until security measures such as E-Verify or an exit-entry visa system are “up and operating effectively,” no current undocumented immigrants could become legalized.

GOP lawmakers also believe that state and local governments, not just the feds, need to be involved in enforcing the law, Goodlatte said.

“When you talk to people about doing immigration reform, you have to assure them and you can't just do it with words,” said Goodlatte. “You've gotta do it with legislative language. Assure them that this president will not have the authority to simply flip a switch and say, ‘I'm not gonna enforce this. I'm not gonna enforce that.’ And that is hard.”

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