

Boehner Hire Signals Possible Action on Immigration

People on both sides of the immigration debate saw House Speaker **John Boehner**'s decision to hire a longtime advocate for immigration legislation as a sign he may be serious about moving something through the House.

Mr. Boehner is hiring **Rebecca Tallent**, who most recently has been the director of immigration policy at the Bipartisan Policy Center but worked for Sen. **John McCain** for many years and was deeply involved in his work to pass an immigration bill during the Bush administration.

“The Speaker remains hopeful that we can enact step-by-step, common-sense immigration reforms – the kind of reforms the American people understand and support,” Boehner spokesman **Michael Steel** said Tuesday. “Becky Tallent, a well-known expert in this field of public policy, is a great addition to our team and that effort.” She starts work on the speaker’s policy staff on Wednesday.

The hire comes amid widespread questions over Mr. Boehner’s intentions on immigration. He said last month that the House would not act until it develops principles to guide legislation, a step that usually comes at the start of a legislative debate and that many read as a stalling tactic aimed at putting off action indefinitely. But many influential Republicans are still pressing hard for action, including the business community, evangelicals and political donors, so there is continued pressure on Mr. Boehner to keep the issue alive.

On Thursday, for instance, the Evangelical Immigration Table will announce a new round of radio and print advertisements urging action in the House. “Please join me in praying for Speaker Boehner and House leadership—that God will help them find an immigration solution that reflects biblical values,” the radio ads say.

In June, the Senate passed a sweeping bill that includes new opportunities for high- and low-skilled immigration, tougher border security and a pathway to citizenship for many of the more than 11 million people in the U.S. illegally now. Mr. Boehner has said that the House will not consider that measure. Further, he has said he will not even try to pass his own bills that can be compromised with the Senate legislation.

Just a handful of House Republicans have said they support legislation along the lines of what the Senate passed, and a vocal group on the other side strongly opposes it. Those in the middle do not appear eager to take up the issue, though it’s unclear what they might ultimately support if a bill or bills were brought to the floor.

Advocates and opponents of immigration legislation read the Tallent hire as a boon to the effort to pass something into law, saying Mr. Boehner would not have hired Ms. Tallent and she would not have taken the job if he wasn’t serious.

“It’s a sign of seriousness. A December hire of a person who knows the substance and how to work in a bipartisan basis suggests it’s an issue they intend to tackle,” said Angela Kelley, an immigration advocate at the Democratic-leaning Center for American Progress. She added, though: “Time will tell what comes of it.”

On the other side of the debate, a leading opponent, Roy Beck of Numbers USA, had a similar read—albeit with a different spin.

“It shows that Speaker Boehner remains committed to the corporate lobbies’ quest for more foreign workers to hold down the wages of their American workers,” he said. “His new hire has done almost nothing the last decade except work for giant increases in foreign labor.”

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