

Boehner says bipartisan group 'basically' has deal on immigration reform

by Russell Berman
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Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) is voicing confidence in the prospects for immigration reform in the House, saying that a bipartisan group of lawmakers “basically [has] an agreement” after more than three years of secret talks.

The Speaker made the previously unreported comments during a question-and-answer session on Tuesday at the Ripon Society, a Republican advocacy group.

In response to a question from the audience, Boehner said it is “time to deal” with immigration, a top domestic priority for Obama.

“I said it the day after the election. I meant it, and we’re going to have to deal with it,” Boehner said. “I think there’s a bipartisan group of members that have been meeting now for three or four years. Frankly, I think they basically have an agreement. I’ve not seen the agreement. I don’t know all the pitfalls in it, but it’s in my view, the right group of members.”

The Speaker did not name the participants, but he said they included “some of the hard heads on our side, and some of the people involved on immigration reform on their side.”

Rep. Raul Labrador (R-Idaho), a conservative in his second term who refused to vote for Boehner for Speaker, has emerged as an immigration point person in the House GOP. A longtime immigration attorney, Labrador has spoken with other House heavyweights on the issue in recent months, including the new chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), and a leading Democratic reform proponent, Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.)

“My theory was, if these folks could work this out, it’d be a big step in the right direction,” Boehner said. “So I would think you’d hear a lot more about immigration reform on the House side soon.”

The Speaker addressed the Ripon Society on Tuesday in an appearance that was closed to the press. The group sent out a video and excerpts of his speech on Wednesday, but Boehner’s more extensive comments in the speech and a question-and-answer session that followed have not been widely reported.

During his 20-minute appearance, Boehner offered perhaps his most expansive outlook on the major issues that Congress is likely to confront at the beginning of Obama’s second term, including gun control, entitlements and tax reform.

Obama is preparing to launch a major push for comprehensive immigration reform with a speech in Las Vegas next week. Much of the spotlight has focused on the Senate, where a bipartisan group is reportedly close to announcing an agreement on basic principles for an overhaul of the system. That

group now includes Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), a potential presidential contender who laid out his principles for reform in the Wall Street Journal earlier this month.

Another potential White House aspirant, Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.), quickly signed on to Rubio's outline.

Still, Boehner's comments to the Ripon Society signal the most optimistic view of the climate in the House, the chamber where the last major immigration effort died in 2006. Since then, the House Republican conference has grown even more conservative, and Boehner said as recently as a year ago that action was unlikely in the short-term.

Boehner spokesman Michael Steel said that while discussion have taken place, legislation is not ready to go.

"Informal groups of members constantly meet to discuss all kinds of issues," he said. "At this point, there is no such legislation scheduled for a hearing, let alone a markup, in the committees of jurisdiction in the House."

<http://thehill.com/homenews/house/279445-boehner-confidence-bipartisan-immigration-bill-will-be-approved-this-congress>