

Boehner urges U.S. House action on immigration amid deep splits

By Richard Cowan and Rachelle Younglai

WASHINGTON (Reuters) – U.S. House of Representatives Speaker John Boehner on Thursday tried to encourage negotiations on immigration legislation amid signs that a bipartisan House group trying to write a bill was near collapse.

"I am concerned that the bipartisan group has been unable to wrap up their work," Boehner told reporters, adding, "I know there are some very difficult issues that have come up."

He made his remarks as the group of Republican and Democratic members - about eight of them - were planning to hold what some congressional aides were describing as "one last-ditch effort" to stay together and produce at least an outline of a bill following about four years of private talks.

This "last-ditch" meeting might not occur until next week.

Congressional sources, who asked not to be identified, over the past week or two have been alluding to difficulties within the group that have risen to the point that there are fears that some might be on the verge of dropping out.

The sources have said that there continue to be differences over the "triggers" that would define when additional border security steps under the legislation would be sufficient to start legalizing some of the 11 million illegal immigrants now in the United States.

There also continued to be disagreements over several other policy issues central to an immigration bill, including the number of foreign high-tech workers who would be allowed into the United States, as well as low-skilled construction and service industry employees.

All of these issues were negotiated in a carefully crafted bipartisan bill now being debated in the Senate Judiciary Committee. That panel is also struggling with the work visa provisions in the bill and is under intense pressure from technology companies to make it easier to hire foreign workers.

The committee hopes to complete work on the nearly 900-page bill by the end of this month, clearing the way for debate in the full Senate as early as June.

Immediately following the November 6 elections, in which Hispanic voters roundly rejected Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, Boehner called on his party to pivot on immigration.

After years of blocking moves to put the 11 million on a pathway to citizenship that many conservatives call "amnesty," Boehner, the top elected U.S. Republican, urged his party to work for a major revamp of [immigration](#) laws.

While citing concerns on Thursday about the lack of progress in the House so far, Boehner said: "I continue to believe that the House...needs to work its will. How we get there, we're still dealing with it."

STRATEGY DEBATE

The chairman of the [House Judiciary Committee](#), Bob Goodlatte of Virginia, has expressed his preference for doing individual bills tackling parts of the immigration policy problems, instead of a comprehensive approach.

But Democrats in both chambers have rejected such a strategy, saying it would indefinitely delay the pathway to citizenship for undocumented residents, many of whom have been in the United States for decades and are raising families here.

Besides policy disagreements, individual members of the House group have differed over whether it would be productive to unveil a House measure while the Senate is in the midst of debating its bill.

Democrats, for example, have been hesitant to embrace a more conservative House immigration bill, which they fear would undercut their fellow Democrats in the Senate.

One of the Republican members of the House negotiating committee, Representative John Carter of Texas, was considering leaving the group, according to several business lobbyists.

Spokesmen for Carter were not immediately available for comment.

<http://news.yahoo.com/boehner-urges-u-house-action-immigration-amid-deep-184854922.html>