

# Boehner: Boost border security before legalizing immigrants

By Russell Berman - 07/08/13 04:47 PM ET

Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) on Monday said enhancements in border security must be “in place” before the process of granting legal status to 11 million illegal immigrants begins, laying down a new marker in the debate over immigration reform.

“The House is going to do its own job on developing an immigration bill,” Boehner said Monday after an event on the Capitol steps on student loans. “But it’s real clear, from everything that I’ve seen and read over the last couple of weeks, that the American people expect that we’ll have strong border security in place before we begin the process of legalizing and fixing our legal immigration system.”

Boehner has been deliberately circumspect in weighing in on the specifics of immigration reform proposals, and so his comments on the timing of legalization are significant as the House embarks on its own effort to rewrite the nation’s immigration laws.

The Speaker will lead a special meeting of the House Republican Conference on Wednesday to discuss immigration reform, and Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.) has said the House could vote on proposals this month before the August recess.

Boehner reiterated that the House would not take up legislation the Senate passed last month, and he did not back away from his pledge that any immigration bill must earn the support of a majority of the chamber’s Republicans to come up for a vote. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) criticized that stance earlier Monday.

The question of when illegal immigrants would be eligible for provisional legal status on their path to full citizenship has emerged as a key dividing point between House Republicans and the bipartisan majority that backed the Senate bill.

In the Senate bill, immigrants would become eligible as early as six months after enactment of the law, but many conservatives want specific border security enhancements to be implemented — and not merely drawn up as a plan — before legalization occurs.

Immigration reform advocates in both parties are ramping up their efforts to pressure House Republicans to back a path to citizenship and comprehensive legislation this week.

The conservative American Action Network is buying ads on Fox News urging Republicans to back the “border surge” that was added to the Senate bill before it passed, calling for \$30 billion to be spent to boost border security.

Liberal advocates with United We Dream are planning rallies and a mock citizenship ceremony on Wednesday to coincide with the House GOP confab.

Those activists adopted a hard line on Monday, saying that they would not support any further compromises on immigration legislation. They said any policy short of a full path to citizenship was “unacceptable,” even if the House GOP agreed to citizenship for the children of illegal immigrants.

“We will not take any more compromises,” said Evelyn Rivera, a member of the United We Dream National Coordinating Committee.

The House Democratic Caucus is also planning a closed-door meeting on immigration for Tuesday.

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