

Coalition of Immigration Advocacy Groups to Push House Toward Comprehensive Bill

By Michael Rose

On the heels of the Senate's passage of a sweeping immigration overhaul measure (S. 744), a coalition of immigration advocacy groups, including the Service Employees International Union, plans to push the House to pass a comparable bill that also includes a path to citizenship, advocates said July 2.

In a conference call with reporters, Deepak Bhargava, executive director of the Center for Community Change and a leader of the Fair Immigration Reform Movement coalition, said his group will spend upward of \$1 million on a public advertising and lobby campaign aimed at pressuring the House to pass a comprehensive overhaul measure before Congress recesses for most of August.

House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) has said his chamber would not take up the Senate bill, which was passed June 27 (124 DLR AA-1, 6/27/13). Meanwhile, several bills dealing with individual parts of the immigration puzzle have been passed out of the House Judiciary Committee, including measures dealing with high-skilled immigration (124 DLR AA-2, 6/27/13), the E-Verify employment verification system (123 DLR A-15, 6/26/13), and agricultural workers (119 DLR A-6, 6/20/13).

"We have some optimism that the House will hear our voice and move forward, but we're also preparing for the possibility that anti-immigrant sentiment will gum up the works and make this process extend longer than we would like," Bhargava said.

Most of the lobbying efforts would be targeted at House Republican leadership, as well as several Republicans in " 'purple districts,' which could be won by either Democrats or Republicans," Bhargava said.

SEIU Official Stresses Worker Protections

Eliseo Medina, secretary-treasurer of SEIU, said the coalition is "refuting the theory that Republicans in the House are untouchable."

"We've heard all the doubts, all the questions" on the likelihood of the House passing an immigration measure, Medina said. Although only 38 House Republicans represent districts where Latinos make up a significant portion of the electorate, "those 38 are enough for them to lose the majority in the House," Medina said.

"For the GOP, the day of reckoning is not far off in the future, it is now," Medina said. If House Republicans fail to act on immigration, they will "lead their party into permanent purgatory, the same place they'd like to leave aspiring Americans," he said.

Medina also said that SEIU and the other members of the coalition will seek to ensure that any legislation considered in the House includes adequate worker protections.

Guestworkers coming into the United States, Medina said, should be able to change jobs while still on the same visa, and be covered under the same labor laws as native workers. The Senate bill includes some of these protections, he said, adding that advocates feel the protections could be stronger and hope to strengthen such provisions in the House legislation.

Immigration advocates have generally been displeased with legislation coming out of the House Judiciary Committee. For example, the United Farm Workers is opposed to the committee's Agricultural Guestworker Act. The group says the measure would eliminate worker protections and lower wages, and would not provide a path to legalization for undocumented agricultural workers currently in the country, instead requiring people to return to their home countries after their visas expired.

By contrast, the Senate measure contains provisions on agricultural workers that were hammered out between UFW and a coalition of agricultural employer groups.