

Democrats Look to Force Vote on Immigration Reform

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House Democrats have introduced a petition to force a vote on the comprehensive immigration reform bill that passed the Senate last year before stalling in the GOP-controlled House. But even Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi concedes the effort is unlikely to succeed

House Democrats on Wednesday introduced a petition to force a vote on the bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill that passed the Senate last year but stalled in the GOP-controlled House.

The so-called discharge petition, if successful, would force the chamber to vote on legislation Republican leaders have said they have no intention of bringing up, preferring a piecemeal approach to the contentious issue. A majority of the House, or 218 members, would have to support the petition in order to force a vote, which is unlikely even by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's own estimation.

But President Barack Obama welcomed the move.

“Last year, Democrats and Republicans in the Senate came together to pass a commonsense bill to fix our broken immigration system—a bill that would grow our economy, shrink our deficits, and reward businesses and workers that play by the rules,” Obama said in a statement. “But so far, Republicans in the House have refused to allow meaningful immigration reform legislation to even come up for a vote. That’s why, today, I applaud the efforts of Democrats in the House to give immigration reform the yes-or-no vote it deserves.”

The Senate-passed bill would secure the nation’s borders and provide an earned pathway to citizenship—a move opposed by conservative Republicans who decry it as amnesty. Democrats on Wednesday also touted a new finding by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office score that it would cut the deficit by \$900 billion over 20 years.

“We’ll never get to 218 on the discharge petition,” Pelosi, a California Democrat, told Sirius XM Radio at an event earlier this month. “Because the Republicans generally won’t sign, but the fact that it is there and the outside mobilization is saying all we want is a vote.”

House Speaker John Boehner's only response on Wednesday was a wry statement from his spokesman. "We agree with Rep. Pelosi," spokesman Michael Steel said, referring to Pelosi's admission that the discharge petition won't succeed.

If the bill were to ever come to the floor it would likely pass with mostly-Democratic support and the backing of some 40 Republicans who have voted for similar measures in the past. But no Republicans are willing to embarrass their leadership on an issue the majority of the conference clearly doesn't support. The three GOP cosponsors of the Democratic immigration bill in the House have said they would not sign the discharge petition.

All that means Wednesday's move will amount to little more than political posturing, a show of support for Latino and immigrant groups by Democrats meaning to shame Republicans on the issue ahead of the midterm elections.

"More than anything, this discharge petition is a nod to growing pressure from the grassroots," said Pramila Jayapal, chair of the pro-reform group We Belong Together. "We know that the majority of Congress agrees with us. We believe that the votes are there on both sides of the aisle to pass truly bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform, and we strongly support this effort to bring a bill to a vote."

This is the Democrats' third discharge petition so far during this Congress. The other two, on bills to raise the minimum wage and extend unemployment insurance, also failed to garner GOP support. The last successful discharge petition in the House was for a campaign finance reform bill in 2001.

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