

# G.O.P. in House Leaves Immigration Bill in Doubt

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*Published: June 25, 2013*

WASHINGTON — With the Senate days away from passing the most significant [immigration](#) legislation in a generation, House Republicans say they feel no pressure to act quickly on a similar measure, leaving the fate of the bill very much in doubt despite solid bipartisan Senate support.

“We have a minority of the minority in the Senate voting for this bill,” said Representative Tom Cole, Republican of Oklahoma, referring to the 15 or so Republicans expected to back the Senate measure. “That’s not going to put a lot of pressure on the majority of the majority in the House.”

Two senior House Republican leadership aides were more blunt when speaking privately: Speaker [John A. Boehner](#) has no intention of angering conservative voters and jeopardizing the House Republican majority in 2014 in the interest of courting Hispanic voters on behalf of a 2016 Republican presidential nominee who does not yet exist.

If anything, the politics of a gerrymandered House where Republican lawmakers have much more to fear politically from the right than from the left could push many Republicans to oppose a conservative alternative to the Senate’s plan.

Even advocates of a comprehensive immigration bill that includes a pathway to legalization for unauthorized immigrants now in the country say that Senate passage as early as Friday would not change House sentiment quickly.

“The House is not going to get logrolled by the Senate,” said Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, who lost his bid to be vice president last year in part because of the [Republican Party](#)’s abysmal showing with immigrant voters. “We’ll have a more methodical, patient way of doing this.”

The outcome of Monday’s crucial vote in the Senate on added border security provided evidence of the difficulty of getting an immigration measure produced in the Democrat-controlled Senate through the Republican-held House. All of the Senate’s Republican leadership opposed the border plan. States represented by the 15 Senate Republicans who backed the proposal have 56 Republican House members, and senators from two of the states — South Carolina and Mississippi — split. The states represented by 30 Republican senators who opposed the border plan or indicated they would — a good gauge of local political sentiment — have 123 Republican members of the House.

“Can we pass a House bill? It’s a very open question,” said Representative Charlie Dent of Pennsylvania, a leading voice among a shrinking group of moderate Republicans. For Republicans, the stakes are high and the crosscurrents are strong. Advocates of the Senate bill say the future of the national Republican Party could rest on how this issue plays out. Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, who helped write the measure, said Tuesday that “the passion level” among Hispanic voters on the immigration issue “is as high as on any issue I’ve observed.”

“If we can’t grow our numbers, particularly among Hispanics, it’s pretty hard to win the White House in 2016,” said Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, another of the bill’s authors. “Don’t get me wrong. Conservatism sells, and after eight years of Obama, people will be looking around for someone new. But it’s hard to sell your economic agenda if they think you’re going to deport their grandmother.”

On the other hand, a vote for legislation like the Senate bill could hold real peril for House Republicans, whose solidly Republican districts reward politicians who take the most conservative positions on issues. [A new poll by National Journal](#) found that nearly half of Republican voters, 49 percent, said a lawmaker who backs legislation offering a pathway to citizenship would lose their support. Thirty percent said it would make no difference. Only 15 percent said such a vote would make them more likely to back their incumbent.

“I think most members look at this with a great deal of trepidation,” Mr. Cole said.

What the House’s methodical approach yields may determine the ultimate fate of immigration legislation in the 113th Congress. If the House can pass its own immigration bill, lawmakers will have a counteroffer to bring to the voters next year — even if the House and Senate bills cannot be reconciled into a final package for President Obama to sign.

That dynamic played out in 2006, when the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration bill, the House passed a measure bolstering border security without offering new paths to legal immigration, and both bills died with the 109th Congress.

But a sizable group of conservatives fear that passing any immigration bill in the House would set up House-Senate negotiations stacked to yield a final deal that would be much closer to the Senate’s plan than the House’s. If that group, in opposition, joins balking Democrats, they could ensure that no conservative immigration bill would pass.

In that case, lawmakers from both parties say pressure from Republicans alarmed about the broad political consequences of inaction could mount on House Republican leaders to move toward the Senate’s position — or even take up the Senate bill without changes. That dynamic has played out twice this year. In January, House Democrats — with a minority of House Republicans — passed a Senate-White House compromise to avert massive tax increases and sudden across-the-board spending cuts, after House Republicans sunk the speaker’s more conservative version of the legislation.

In February, a Republican version of the Violence Against Women Act crashed on the House floor, prompting Republican leaders to [allow the House to pass](#) the Senate's version — again relying on a majority of Democratic votes.

“Be a speaker, lead the Congress, let Democrats vote,” Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, on Tuesday urged Mr. Boehner.

It will likely take months for the issue to play out. Mr. Boehner has called a July 10 meeting of all House Republicans to hash over a way forward. In the meantime, the House Judiciary Committee will continue passing a series of piecemeal bills that already include a border security bill, an agriculture guest worker plan, and, this week, measures to create a fortified employment eligibility verification system and to expand immigration for science, technology, engineering and mathematics experts.

House Republican leadership aides say the House might bundle those measures into a package to bring to House-Senate negotiations or draft a new, more comprehensive version, depending on the mood of Republicans after the Fourth of July recess.

Republican lawmakers see little chance of action until this fall or winter. After Congress's August recess, lawmakers will return to Washington to confront two unavoidable fiscal challenges. First, comes Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year, when a government shutdown looms over sharp differences between the House and Senate over spending levels. That will be followed quickly by the next showdown over the government's statutory borrowing limit, which House Republicans will use to try to force concessions from President Obama on taxes and entitlement programs like [Medicare](#).

An immigration battle is a distant second to those matters, Republicans say.

“I don't know why we'd get embroiled in this fight, which is apt to be very divisive in the conference, before we take care of the more immediate issues,” Mr. Cole said.

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