

GOP Nixes Immigration Reform In 2013 -- And Probably 2014 Too

[Sahil Kapur](#) – November 12, 2013, 10:10 AM EST3062

Republicans have indicated they won't take up immigration reform this year, dimming hopes that Congress will address the issue before the Senate-passed bill dies at the end of the legislative session in early 2015.

Late Friday afternoon, Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) leaked word to [The Associated Press](#) that there weren't enough days on the legislative calendar to vote on immigration in 2013 -- just 16 days remain. McCarthy's office confirmed the report to TPM moments later.

"It's an outrage that House leadership is signaling no floor action on immigration reform this year," said Frank Sharry, the executive director of the pro-reform group America's Voice. "They have all of November and most of December to take action."

Mark Krikorian, who leads the Center For Immigration Studies, which supports more restrictive immigration policies, said the announcement reveals that House GOP leaders recognize their voters oppose reform, even though they "want to be responsive to the corporate interests" pushing for an overhaul.

"The immigration fight is never really over but the odds of success of the amnesty and open immigration project are dropping rapidly, at least for the next couple of years," Krikorian said in an email. "Amnesty boosters will try to put a happy spin on it, but the repeated delays from their confidently announced deadlines is making them sound like the contractor who spends months saying your kitchen will be done in two more weeks."

What GOP leadership is obscuring is that the calendar is even less kind to taking on a complex issue like immigration reform in 2014. The deadline to keep the government funded or face another shutdown is Jan. 15. Then in February or March, Congress will have to raise the debt limit again or risk default. These budget battles could be bruising for the GOP. Then comes primary season in May, when Republicans will be polishing their conservative credentials for GOP voters, who resent any form of "amnesty" for people in the U.S. illegally. On Jan. 4, 2015, the new Congress begins and the bipartisan Senate bill becomes defunct.

"I'm hopeful that we can get to it early next year," Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) told the [Washington Post](#). "But I am keenly aware that next year, you start running into the election cycle. If we cannot get it done by early next year, then it's clearly dead. It flatlines."

Even if they found the time, voting on immigration in 2014 would be painful for House GOP leaders, revealing profound splits within the party over an extremely emotional issue. There's no indication that Speaker John Boehner (R-OH), who likes party unity and has little control of his

conference as is, has the appetite for this, particularly when there's no consensus among Republicans on how to move forward.

"In the context of the GOP civil war, it gets complicated," said a House Democratic aide close to the cause of immigration reform.

House GOP leaders have been [slowly dimming the chances of passing](#) immigration reform, cautious to make sure pro-reformers couldn't pinpoint one moment at which the GOP scuttled it. The approach, conscious or not, has been to gradually lower expectations such that no single development guarantees doom for the cause. But taken together, what emerges is a picture of a House Republican conference that simply doesn't -- and never did -- have the appetite for broad reforms to help immigrants, especially those without papers.

First they [rejected](#) the Senate's bill, which tackled immigration reform in one comprehensive bill, opting instead to pass piecemeal measures that ultimately stalled. Then they [imposed](#) the Hastert Rule, saying no bill would get a vote unless it was supported by a majority of the House's majority party. Then they imposed the [same rule](#) for any bill that might emerge from a House-Senate conference committee. Then Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-VA), the chairman with jurisdiction, [came out against](#) any bill that would promise eventual citizenship to unauthorized immigrants, even those brought to the United States as children. Then after the budget battles this fall, even pro-immigration Republicans said they [wouldn't play ball](#) with President Barack Obama on immigration. By that point, even Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) [was backing away](#).

"The House has plenty of time left this year to introduce a bill, hold hearings, and bring it to the floor for a vote. What's lacking, apparently, is the will," said Lynn Tramonte, the deputy director of America's Voice. Although supporters say they aren't giving up on reform in 2014, Sharry warned that if Republicans "don't act on immigration reform next year, advocates across the country will turn their focus to electing a Congress that will take action."

The desperate pleas from GOP strategists, after the party's 2012 thumping, to be more welcoming of immigrants -- as well as gays and lesbians, young voters, minorities and women -- have fallen flat in the House. Boehner has been powerless to do anything about it. The broad coalitions for immigration reform -- business, labor, tech, evangelicals, Hispanics -- mean nothing to the tea party base, which is dead set against legalizing immigrants living in the U.S. illegally and sees cultural diversification as an existential threat to the country. These voters call the shots among House Republicans, many of whom are in safe, gerrymandered districts and worry more about right-wing primary challengers than general elections.

A Democracy Corps [study](#) last month provided a glimpse into the GOP voter's mind, reporting that a dominant conviction is that "[t]he Democratic Party exists to create programs and dependency -- the food stamp hammock, entitlements, the 47 percent. And on the horizon -- comprehensive immigration reform and Obamacare. Citizenship for 12 million illegals and tens of million getting free health care is the end of the road."

Multiple House GOP leadership aides declined to comment for this article.

What comes next is unclear. So far this year, the only immigration bill House Republicans have voted for is Rep. Steve King's (R-IA) proposal to reverse Obama's executive action against deporting DREAMers. It's plausible that GOP leaders will want to vote on face-saving reforms -- perhaps to border security and legal immigration -- in order to avoid going into the next election appearing too anti-immigrant.

"[Y]es, it is a victory of sorts for immigration hawks," said Krikorian, "though by no means a definitive one. If this were the Russian Front, the open-borders crowd has been stopped before Moscow, but there's a long way to go yet."

<http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/house-gop-officially-kills-immigration-reform-in-2013-and-probably-for-good>