

House GOP plans no immigration vote in 2013

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House Republican leadership has no plans to vote on any immigration reform legislation before the end of the year.

The House has just 19 days in session before the end of 2013, and there are a number of reasons why immigration reform is stalled this year.

Following the fiscal battles last month, the internal political dynamics are tenuous within the House Republican Conference. A growing chorus of GOP lawmakers and aides are intensely skeptical that any of the party's preferred piecemeal immigration bills can garner the support of 217 Republicans — they would need that if Democrats didn't lend their votes. Republican leadership doesn't see anyone coalescing around a single plan, according to sources across GOP leadership. Leadership also says skepticism of President Barack Obama within the House Republican Conference is at a high, and that's fueled a desire to stay out of a negotiating process with the Senate. Republicans fear getting jammed.

Of course, the dynamics could change. Some, including Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.), are eager to pass something before the end of the year. Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) has signaled publicly that he would like to move forward in 2013 on an overhaul of the nation's immigration laws. If Republicans win some Democratic support on piecemeal bills, they could move forward this year. But still, anything that makes its way to the floor needs to have significant House Republican support.

And Obama is also ramping up his messaging on immigration reform. "It's good for our economy, it's good for our national security, it's good for our people, and we should do it this year," Obama said Thursday. That same afternoon his chief of staff Denis McDonough met with business CEOs to strategize on immigration reform. Attendees included representatives from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.

Getting immigration through this deeply divided Congress in 2014 — an election year — would be incredibly difficult. That's why immigration reform supporters are growing increasingly worried that the window for a bigger reform package could be slipping away since it would be even more difficult to try and forge ahead in an election year.

"I think there are a lot of folks who are concerned about this issue not getting solved, and I think legitimately so," Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.) told POLITICO. "Because I do think that every day that goes by, it makes it more and more difficult."

Other prominent immigration supporters like Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) have also backed off any deal, saying the Obama administration has "undermined" negotiations by not defunding his signature health

care law. Rep. Raul Labrador (R-Idaho) went further, saying Obama is trying to “destroy the Republican Party” and that GOP leaders would be “crazy” to enter into talks with Obama.

That rhetoric combined with signals in private conversations with lawmakers and staff has led some immigration advocates to say they see the writing on the wall and they aren’t going to invest heavily until there’s more momentum.

“After Obama poisoned the well in the fiscal showdown and [House Minority Leader Nancy] Pelosi now is actively trying to use immigration as a political weapon, the chances for substantive reforms, unfortunately, seem all but gone,” said one GOP operative involved in the conservative pro-immigration movement.

Many of the groups that ran ads after the Senate passed its immigration bill — including the American Action Network and U.S. Chamber of Commerce — have gone silent on air. Several immigration reform proponents said that until House Republicans come up with legislation, there won’t be any television advertising campaigns.

Liberals’ patience with House Republicans is also waning, as many argue that its time for the Obama administration to step in. National Day Laborer Organizing Network Executive Director Pablo Alvarado has been leading the charge, pressing the White House to use his “existing legal authority to alleviate the suffering of immigrants.”

Frank Sharry of America’s Voice said there is a “strong preference” for action before the end of the year.

“We’re either going to pass immigration reform or punish Republicans who block it,” Sharry said. “If they can’t convince their leadership then of course we want a Democratic majority that will ... We’d much rather have a signing ceremony on immigration reform than a punishing electoral campaign where we’re trying to take people out.”

It’s unclear how exactly the outside groups will put pressure on members up for reelection. Sharry said he it is unlikely they would get involved in primaries, but could exert influence in the general election in Colorado, California, Nevada, Florida, Texas and Illinois where there are large Latino populations.

Whether groups on the right follow suit is unclear.

“The left is going to start ramping it up big time. The question is what are the business community and the center-right groups going to do,” said one immigration lobbyist.

For now, conservative and business groups are focused on putting pressure on Republicans to take action.

Conservative immigration reform groups will bring more than 400 local business, law enforcement and religious leaders next week to Washington to try and increase the pressure on rank-and-file GOP lawmakers to force leaders to move on reform.

And champions of the effort argue there is still a possibility for forward movement.

“There is still an appetite to get comprehensive immigration reform done this year,” U.S. Chamber of Commerce head Tom Donohue told reporters recently. “There is still strong support among the public and lawmakers. And our nation—our economy, our businesses, and our workers—need it more than ever.”

The Chamber is also releasing Friday an immigration “Myths and Facts” document trying to debunk some fallacies on immigration reform.

And even if passage of any kind of reform passage doesn’t happen by the end of December, it doesn’t mean the fight is over. Partnership for a New American Economy’s Jeremy Robbins said the question is when “the next moment” would be for reform. And

“There’s a lot of political challenges, but it’s also a very real opening,” Robbins said. “Coming out of this opening. If we get immigration reform fantastic, if not, then how are we poised to be bigger and stronger for the next opening in the spring.”

<http://www.politico.com/story/2013/10/house-gop-plans-no-immigration-vote-in-2013-98824.html>