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House Judiciary chairman rejects ‘special’ path to citizenship, promises to fight Senate bill

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VERONA, Va. — The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee is rejecting the idea of giving immigrants in the U.S. illegally a special pathway to citizenship.

Republican congressman Bob Goodlatte of Virginia told a town hall meeting in the Shenandoah Valley on Monday that the House must chart its own course on immigration even if it never results in a bill President Barack Obama can sign. He said that he’ll do everything he can to ensure the House never takes up the Senate’s comprehensive immigration bill, which includes a path to citizenship for the 11 million immigrants in the country illegally.

Goodlatte said the House will proceed with individual immigration bills once lawmakers return to Washington in September from their summer recess, beginning with bills on interior enforcement, border security and workplace verification.

The focus of the House’s Republican majority should be on how to “reform immigration the right way to show how it should be done, even if it doesn’t go all the way through to be signed by this president. Because I have a hard time, like you do, envisioning him signing some of these things,” Goodlatte told one questioner. “It doesn’t mean we shouldn’t at least show the American people that we are interested in solving this very serious problem that we have in our country.”

In a scene playing out at town hall meetings across the country this August, Goodlatte faced several questions supportive of immigration legislation from activists sent by a pro-immigrant group, Virginia Organizing. Some immigration advocacy groups are pressing House Republicans to support overhauling immigration laws.

But speaking to a capacity crowd of more than 200 people at a local government building in Verona, Va., he gave no sign of altering the position he’s been articulating for months: that immigrants here illegally should not get what he terms a “special” pathway to citizenship, which is what he sees in the Senate bill.

Goodlatte has said that immigrants could get a legal status short of citizenship and from there using the existing pathways of family or employment ties to eventually obtain citizenship. And he criticized advocates for citizenship, saying they’ve been standing in the way of other reforms as they hold out for their goal.

“The folks who want to have a path to citizenship have held everything else hostage,” Goodlatte said. “Now we want to say, ‘Look we understand what you want but we think a legal status in the United States but not a special path to citizenship might be appropriate’” once steps including border security have been accomplished.

Goodlatte’s comments underscored the tough road ahead for Congress in agreeing to a compromise immigration bill, one of Obama’s top second-term priorities.

The far-reaching bill passed by the Democratic-led Senate in June includes billions for border security and new measures on legal immigration and workplace enforcement, in addition to a path to citizenship. But the GOP-controlled House has rejected that approach and plans to proceed with single-issue bills.

Even where there is overlap — such as on allowing legal status or citizenship for immigrants brought illegally to this country as youths, something Goodlatte and a number of other Republicans support — it’s not clear that will produce agreement in Congress. Democrats and the White House have already rejected a bill that deals only with immigrants brought here as kids and leaves their parents out, but Goodlatte and other House Republicans have shown little openness to dealing with the status of the parents of so-called “DREAMers” in addition to the kids themselves.

Goodlatte said he anticipated the bill he is working on dealing with the status of immigrants brought as kids would be introduced soon, but indicated there was still work to be done to determine whether enough consensus existed to move it through committee and pass it out of the House.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/house-judiciary-chairman-rejects-special-path-to-citizenship-promises-to-fight-senate-bill/2013/08/19/7bc0d96e-0938-11e3-89fe-abb4a5067014_story.html