

House Republicans mull ways to advance immigration bill

Fri, Jun 28 2013

By [Richard Cowan](#) and [Rachelle Younglai](#)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Prospects for congressional passage of a U.S. immigration overhaul looked bleak on Friday, but some House Republicans signaled they would offer a way for the 11 million illegal immigrants already in the country to get legal status that could be portrayed as something other than a pathway to citizenship.

The Democratic-controlled Senate on Thursday approved a bipartisan immigration bill backed by President Barack Obama, but leaders of the Republican-controlled House of Representatives are not expected to take action on the measure.

Instead, the House is charting its own course because many conservative Republicans firmly oppose the citizenship provisions in the Senate version as "amnesty" for law-breakers.

But a proposal being talked about in the House as an alternative to the Senate bill would offer possible citizenship in the future after current illegal immigrants spend at least a decade in a legalized status short of citizenship. The approach is similar to the Senate-passed bill.

The difference may be one of semantics, in which the term "pathway to citizenship" can be averted. But the House approach might offer at least a glimmer of hope for enactment of immigration reform any time soon - in part just because it would originate in the Republican-controlled chamber.

Republican Representative John Carter of Texas, one of seven Republicans and Democrats who have been working privately on a House immigration bill, is among those crafting the alternative.

When asked how the House might address the central challenge of what to do about the 11 million illegal immigrants - most of them Hispanics - Carter sketched out a plan that tracks closely to the measure passed in the Senate.

In his approach, the 11 million would spend 10 years in a legalized status that provides them with work permits. At some point after that, they could be considered for permanent resident status, followed by possible citizenship.

A senior House aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said such a plan could be presented in the House later this year, but that it would have to contain some tougher provisions than the Senate measure.

Underscoring the sensitivity of doing anything that looks like House Republicans are embracing "amnesty," the aide added: "If you (in the media) call it a 'pathway to citizenship' you will be responsible for killing immigration reform."

The Senate bill, approved on Thursday by a 68-32 vote with 14 of the Senate's 46 Republicans going along, would put millions of illegal immigrants on a pathway to legal status and citizenship. Republicans in the House immediately called it "dead on arrival."

HISPANIC VOTERS

Hispanics, a fast-growing segment of the U.S. population, voted overwhelming for Obama, a Democrat, in last year's election. Some Republicans have expressed concern about hurting their party for years to come by continuing to alienate Hispanics on the immigration issue.

House Speaker John Boehner has said he will not advance an immigration bill unless it has the support of a majority of the House's 234 Republicans, ruling out chances of a Senate bill passed largely by Democrats with some Republican support.

Many saw that as the death knell for comprehensive immigration reform since so many House Republicans are thought to oppose the pathway to citizenship.

Republican Representative Tom Cole of Oklahoma said in an interview that he did not envision an immigration bill on the House floor this year "unless it's very late in the year" and "may go into next year" as lawmakers deal with more pressing budget and financial issues.

Referring to Boehner's conditions, Democratic Representative Chris Van Hollen of Maryland said: "That's anti-democratic and I'm afraid that could doom the prospects of immigration reform." Appearing on MSNBC, Van Hollen added, "No one's giving up yet. I still think there's great hope. But that was not a promising statement."

Republican Representative Trey Gowdy of South Carolina, who chairs a House panel that oversees immigration, on Thursday was asked by Reuters whether the Senate's immigration reform bill was dead in the House. He responded: "Dead has a certain finality to it. I would say it's on life support."

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the Obama administration in coming days will do what it can to try to build support in the House.

At least some House Republicans publicly support a pathway to citizenship for the illegal immigrants already in the country. Representative Spencer Bachus of Alabama, a member of the House Judiciary Committee that has been writing more limited immigration bills, has become an outspoken advocate of ending the deportation fears of these 11 million people.

"A path to citizenship is not popular in Alabama. However, I have stated - against public opinion in my state - that I am for a path to citizenship because I don't believe in second-class citizens," Bachus told Reuters.

He added, "If you don't have a pathway to citizenship, you create an underclass."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/28/us-usa-immigration-idUSBRE95R14T20130628>