

Immigration overhaul dead in the House?

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Despite a rush to write the obituary for immigration reform, House Speaker John Boehner has not closed the door on the issue entirely.

WASHINGTON — House Speaker John Boehner startled immigration advocates this week when he said his chamber would never consider a sweeping immigration bill passed by the Senate and wouldn't commit to voting on House immigration proposals by the end of the year.

But despite a rush to write the obituary for an overhaul of immigration, Boehner has not closed the door on the issue entirely. The latest lifeline came when Boehner asked Rep. Jeff Denham, R-Calif., to gauge the interest of House Republicans on taking up the contentious issue.

Denham was [the first Republican](#) to co-sponsor a Democratic immigration bill that provides a pathway to citizenship for the nation's 12 million undocumented immigrants. Now Denham is asking for signatures from his GOP colleagues on a letter of support for immigration overhaul and is initially targeting a group of 40-45 Republicans who he believes could sign on.

"The speaker basically said, 'Show me how much support there is to bring this up,'" Denham said Thursday. "So we're circulating the letter to show him how many members are pushing hard to get immigration to the floor."

Roy Beck, president of NumbersUSA, a group that helped defeat a similar immigration effort in 2007 and is fighting hard against this year's efforts, said Boehner and other Republican leaders are still looking for ways to pass some kind of immigration overhaul. He said they feel a political need to do so to win over the ever-growing Hispanic electorate.

"I have no question in my mind that Boehner and (Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va.) still believe the storyline that politically you have to do something and you have to pass some kind of amnesty," Beck said. "That's why you can't declare this thing dead."

The Senate got things started this year when it [passed a sweeping immigration bill](#) in June that would allow the nation's 12 million undocumented immigrants to apply for citizenship, bolster the border and revamp the legal immigration system to bring in more high-tech and low-skilled workers. Boehner said this week that he has "no intention of ever going to conference on the Senate bill," meaning he would not allow his chamber to negotiate with the Senate over their proposal.

Instead, Boehner and Republican leaders are pushing a piecemeal approach. House committees have approved five smaller immigration bills — three that enhance immigration enforcement and two that would increase the number of visas for foreign workers — and Boehner wants to

continue that process. Republicans also continue crafting bills that would address the fate of the nation's undocumented immigrants.

While many have been disheartened because of the slow pace on immigration in the House, supporters have turned up the pressure this week in a variety of ways to get the House GOP moving.

Five people started a hunger strike Tuesday inside a tent on the National Mall, vowing to continue until Congress passes an immigration overhaul. They are fasting across from the Capitol and are being visited by members of Congress, clergy and other supporters.

A group of immigrant children marched on the Capitol earlier in the week, even [cornering Boehner](#) at his regular breakfast restaurant to share their stories of relatives who have been deported and urging him to overhaul immigration.

In another facet of the immigration push, 22 immigrants were arrested outside an Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in New Orleans on Thursday after protesting the record pace of deportations under President Obama.

And back in Washington, leaders of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Southern Baptist Convention, Americans for Tax Reform and law enforcement leaders said they were actually encouraged by Boehner's recent statements. Pointing to his assurances that he was still pushing for immigration overhaul in the House, the leaders said they remained confident that something would get done.

"There has never been a confusion or a frustration about thinking the House was going to do the same kind of comprehensive bill that the Senate did," said chamber president Tom Donohue.

"The dance of how you do it in the House, how you do it in the Senate, who goes first, who goes second, who gets credit, who doesn't get credit...that's the normal course of business here."

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