

Immigration Overhaul Seems On Track Despite Boston Tragedy

April 22, 2013 7:38 PM

No sooner did the first reports emerge that the suspects in the Boston Marathon bombings were Chechen immigrants than did that fact intrude into Washington's debate on immigration.

Opponents of immigration reform seized on the fact to raise doubts about efforts to change immigration laws to, in part, bring the estimated 12 million people now in the U.S. illegally out of limbo.

So a major question a week after the bombings was whether the Boston violence had slowed — or even derailed — momentum for the immigration overhaul. Early indications were that the legislative effort still appeared on track.

"I don't think there's been a change in the fundamental truth that the country needs this broad immigration reform and that there's a commitment from lawmakers in both parties to addressing it this year. That hasn't changed" because of Boston, said , deputy director of America's Voice, a pro-immigration group. "Most responsible legislators are not only saying, 'Let's look at all the facts,' but they're also saying, 'Let's move forward.' "

White House spokesman Jay Carney sounded a similar note during his Monday briefing:

"Well, I think we agree with what some of the co-authors of the bill — including, I believe, Sens. [John] McCain and [Lindsey] Graham and [Marco] Rubio — have said, which is that one of the positive effects and one of the reasons why we need comprehensive immigration reform is because it will enhance when implemented our national security. And it is another reason why we need to move forward with this very important bipartisan legislation. That is certainly our view."

Even Sen. Charles Grassley, the Iowa Republican who caused a stir by remarking last week that the immigration-overhaul effort had to now be considered with the attacks in mind, insisted he wasn't trying to stall or kill the effort.

In fact, one of the livelier moments at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing Monday came when Grassley took exception to Sen. Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat and Gang of Eight member, who accused some critics of using the tragedy to impede the legislation.

"The American people are overwhelmingly for immigration reform," Schumer said. "That's what every poll says. And they will not be satisfied with calls for delays and impediments towards the bill. I would say to my colleagues ... if you have ways to improve the bill, offer an amendment. ... I say that particularly to those who are pointing to what happened, the terrible tragedy in

Boston as, I would say, an excuse for not doing a bill or delaying a bill for many months or years."

"I never said that. I never said that," Grassley yelled at Schumer. The exchange caused Sen. Patrick Leahy, the Vermont Democrat who chairs the committee, to bang his gavel to regain order.

Like Grassley, Sen. Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, appeared to acknowledge the need to continue pursuing an overhaul, though he went further by calling for a pause until the implications of what happened in Boston are better understood. Paul wrote:

"Before Congress moves forward, some important national security questions must be addressed. I believe that any real comprehensive immigration reform must implement strong national security protections. The facts emerging in the Boston Marathon bombing have exposed a weakness in our current system. If we don't use this debate as an opportunity to fix flaws in our current system, flaws made even more evident last week, then we will not be doing our jobs."

Another telling sign came from Republican Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the 2012 GOP vice presidential nominee. After an appearance in Chicago, Ryan told reporters, according to , that the Boston attacks was an argument for, not against, revising the nation's laws sooner rather than later.

It was vital to know which individuals are in the country illegally for national security reasons, alone, he said. "If anything I would say this is an argument for modernizing our immigration laws," Ryan was quoted as saying.

Such national security arguments, the needs of the U.S. economy and the demographic changes that are making Hispanic voters an ever more important part of the electorate gave proponents of an immigration overhaul confidence that Boston wouldn't derail the present effort.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2013/04/22/178483182/immigration-overhaul-seems-on-track-despite-boston-tragedy>