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In House, Immigration Spurs Push by G.O.P.

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WASHINGTON — With the Senate beginning debate next week on an ambitious bill to overhaul the [immigration](#) system, Republicans in the House moved this week to set a tougher tone on the issue and to stake out their own course on legislation.

Late Wednesday, a bipartisan group of representatives who had been meeting to write a broad immigration bill announced they had completed their negotiations. But a prominent Republican in the group, Raúl Labrador of Idaho, said he was leaving. Mr. Labrador said that he disagreed with the other lawmakers over health care provisions for illegal immigrants who would gain legal status under the measure.

“I have the firm position the U.S. taxpayer should not be liable for the health care of people who are here illegally, who are going to become legal under any of these processes,” Mr. Labrador said in an interview on Thursday. “So I don’t think we could ever come to an agreement on that, so I just decided I’d better work on my own legislation.”

Other members of the group, both Republicans and Democrats, were frustrated by Mr. Labrador’s departure in the final hours of the negotiations, after the group had reached agreement on many thorny issues, including a path to legal status for 11 million immigrants here illegally. Lawmakers from both parties had been counting on Mr. Labrador, a Latino who is aligned with the [Tea Party](#) and was formerly an immigration lawyer, to help sell the bill to skeptical conservative Republicans, aides said.

Mr. Labrador’s health care proposal would have required immigrants who gained legal status under the bill to buy private health insurance or pay any health care costs they incurred — even emergency care — or else they would face deportation, House aides said. Democrats in the group worried that such terms would have dissuaded immigrants who could not afford health insurance from seeking treatment at a hospital, since that might have put them at risk of deportation.

Mr. Labrador’s proposal would not have allowed any government funds to be used to assist the immigrants, although he would have permitted them to continue on the path to legal status if they at least made a good-faith effort to repay their hospital bills. Both Republicans and Democrats in the group agreed that immigrants gaining legal status would not receive any subsidies under President Obama’s [health care law](#), nor would they be eligible for any other federal low-income health care assistance.

“My decision yesterday doesn’t change my support for immigration reform,” Mr. Labrador said. “We just have to do it right.” He said he would pursue a “step-by-step approach,” probably opting for more than one bill rather than trying to wrap the whole complex overhaul into one

measure, as the Senate has done. The remaining bipartisan House group said it would introduce its broad bill in coming weeks.

Mr. Labrador's move offered a new option to Speaker John A. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, who has pressed the bipartisan group to finish its work but also encouraged the chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Robert W. Goodlatte, Republican of Virginia, to prepare a series of bills addressing separate parts of the dysfunctional immigration system. On Thursday, Mr. Goodlatte introduced the latest of those bills, a measure to toughen enforcement away from the borders.

But House Republicans also sent a strong signal on Thursday that they are inclined to take a much harder line on immigration than the Senate and the White House are advocating. In a vote of 224 to 201 along stark party lines, the House adopted an amendment by Representative Steve King, an Iowa Republican and immigration hawk, to a spending bill for the Department of Homeland Security. The amendment would shut down a program, initiated by President Obama as an executive action without approval from Congress, that has granted reprieves from deportation to more than 290,000 young unauthorized immigrants who came here as children.

"My amendment blocks many of the provisions that are mirrored in the Senate's bill," Mr. King said. "If this position holds, no amnesty will reach the president's desk."

The deportation deferral program is very popular with Latinos, and the amendment drew cries of outrage from young immigrants' groups. Its passage was largely symbolic, since it has no chance of passing the Senate.

But the White House, which has been largely quiet during the Congressional debate so far, weighed in. Jay Carney, the spokesman, said the amendment "runs contrary to our most deeply held values as Americans." He said the amendment would treat young immigrants as if they were criminals. "It's wrong. It's not who we are. And it will not become law," Mr. Carney said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/07/us/politics/house-republicans-seek-tougher-line-on-immigration.html>