

Key GOP House chairman open to citizenship path

by Alan Gomez, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON - Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., has long said that the nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants should never get a "special" pathway to citizenship. Now, for the first time, he is saying they could get some path.

Goodlatte, who holds considerable influence over the immigration debate as chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, said during an interview taped Thursday for C-SPAN's *Newsmakers* that he could see a plan in which adult undocumented immigrants are given a temporary legal status and could later apply for green cards and U.S. citizenship.

"To create a new category for people who came in here illegally does not sit well with a great many Americans," Goodlatte said. However, "I and other members are open-minded to the idea that they should have a way to come out of the shadows, to be able to work, to have their own businesses, to pay their taxes, to travel back and forth to their home country and elsewhere."

After attaining that status, Goodlatte said, they could then apply for legal permanent residence and eventually U.S. citizenship through avenues that are already available to foreigners: marrying a U.S. citizen, having a U.S. citizen relative petition for them or having a U.S. employer sponsor their application.

"All of those are ways that they could then eventually find themselves permanent residents and ultimately citizens, but none of those are special ways that have been made available only to people who are here illegally," Goodlatte said.

Figuring out what to do with the nation's unauthorized immigrants is one of the most contentious issues in the immigration debate and could sink any hopes of a rewrite of the nation's immigration laws.

The Senate passed a bill last month that allows the nation's undocumented immigrants to be placed in a temporary legal status in which they can live and work legally, and then apply for their green cards 10 years later and U.S. citizenship three years after that.

House Republicans have resisted that plan. Some, such as Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, call it "amnesty" for people who've broken the law. Others, such as Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., propose a middle ground in which people can get "long-term" guestworker visas but not citizenship.

Democrats have fought back, saying any bill that doesn't allow the nation's undocumented immigrants to eventually become U.S. citizens will not be accepted. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., said such a bill would not pass the Senate, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said those proposals would receive no Democratic support.

Goodlatte is also embracing an idea to provide a quicker path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the country as children, known as DREAMers after a failed bill in Congress, known as the DREAM Act, that was designed to help them. He is working with House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., on a bill aimed at that population, and said his committee will hold a hearing on it before the end of the month.

The interview will air Sunday on C-SPAN and 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/07/11/immigration-goodlatte-pathway-citizenship/2510021/>