

Legal Status, Not Citizenship, in GOP's Immigration Plan

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Congressional Republicans unveiled their party's guidelines for comprehensive immigration reform on Thursday, indicating a willingness to work with Democrats on an overhaul after failing to take up a U.S. Senate measure passed in June.

The guidelines, however, do not include a pathway to citizenship for a majority of the estimated 11.5 million undocumented immigrants residing in the country. Instead, the party suggests a path to legal status for those who pay fines and pass background checks.

“That [pathway to citizenship] would be unfair to those immigrants who have played by the rules and harmful to promoting the rule of law,” the document says.

But undocumented immigrants brought to the country “through no fault of their own” — a reference to children who were raised in the U.S. after being brought or sent here by relatives — would be allowed to obtain citizenship after they meet certain conditions.

“For those who meet certain eligibility standards, and serve honorably in our military or attain a college degree, we will do just that,” the guideline reads.

The Senate version passed in June would have allowed most of the undocumented immigrants to enter into a 13-year path toward citizenship, also contingent on paying fines and background checks. The citizenship provision proved to be a major obstacle, however, and Republicans were also critical of Democrats' attempt to include several provisions on border security and a guest-worker program into one bill.

Like that measure, however, the GOP plan unveiled Thursday would require meeting specific border security triggers before reform begins.

“We must secure our borders now and verify that they are secure. In addition, we must ensure now that when immigration reform is enacted, there will be a zero-tolerance policy for those who cross the border illegally or overstay their visas in the future,” the statement reads.

Frank Sharry, the executive director of America's Voice, a progressive pro-reform group, said Thursday's action signaled a good first step. But the group also indicated it would eventually return to insist on citizenship for most undocumented immigrants.

“Now it's time for them to translate these vague principles into a legislative proposal. Only then will we be able to judge whether House Republicans are serious about meeting our standards: an

inclusive path to legal status upfront and an achievable path to citizenship over time,” Sharry said. Limiting the citizenship provision to certain immigrants, he said, would create a “permanent underclass [that] is inconsistent with who we are as Americans.”

<http://www.texastribune.org/2014/01/30/legal-status-not-citizenship-gops-immigration-plan/>