

Original Co-Sponsors of H.R. 15 Send Memo Seeking More Discharge Petition Signatures

By Laura D. Francis

April 15 — Five Democrats who were the original co-sponsors of a comprehensive immigration bill (H.R. 15) introduced in the House are sending an e-mail memorandum to 30 Republican colleagues asking them to sign a discharge petition to force a floor vote on the measure.

“We are formally issuing a memo to call for a number of Republicans who have verbally expressed support for comprehensive immigration reform to sign on the dotted line,” Rep. Jared Polis (D-Colo.) said during an April 15 press call.

Polis said “nearly every Democrat” in the House has signed the petition, and there are three Republican co-sponsors of the bill, introduced last October (192 DLR A-14, 10/2/13). He said the memo asks the 30 House Republicans who have said they want an overhaul of the immigration system to “put their pen where their mouth is.”

A group of House Democrats filed the discharge petition March 26, arguing that H.R. 15 would pass the House if Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) would allow a vote on the measure (58 DLR A-6, 3/26/14).

Thus far, the petition has garnered 191 signatures, all of them Democrats, Polis said April 15. It needs 218 to compel a floor vote.

“What’s clear is we’ve done everything possible to work with the party on the other side of the aisle,” Rep. Joe Garcia (D-Fla.) said. “We’ve done everything possible to bring our opponents to the table and find a solution,” but if that doesn’t happen then President Barack Obama “will be forced to act,” he said.

Memo to 30 Republicans

The 30 Republicans targeted by the memo are: Reps. Don Young (Alaska); Chris Stewart (Utah); Sean Duffy (Wis.); Spencer Bachus (Ala.); Jeff Denham (Calif.); David Valadao (Calif.); Greg Walden (Ore.); Paul Ryan (Wis.); Michael Grimm (N.Y.); Darrell Issa (Calif.); Mark Amodei (Nev.); Mike Coffman (Colo.); James Lankford (Okla.); Mike Kelly (Pa.); Mario Diaz-Balart (Fla.); Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Fla.); Devin Nunes (Calif.); Jason Chaffetz (Utah); Joe Heck (Nev.); Peter King (N.Y.); Raul Labrador (Idaho); Sam Johnson (Texas); John Carter (Texas); Daniel Webster (Fla.); Aaron Schock (Ill.); Steve Pearce (N.M.); Tim Griffin (Ark.); Justin Amash (Mich.); Vance McAllister (La.); and Renee Ellmers (N.C.).

Denham, Ros-Lehtinen and Valadao are the three Republican co-sponsors of H.R. 15 (213 DLR A-8, 11/1/13).

The memo was tailored to individual members, mentioning the particular member's support for an immigration overhaul and urging the person to “join us to finish the job.” The memo then addresses the effect of overhauling the immigration system on the particular member's state, as well as the benefits to the country as a whole.

“The time to act is now. The votes are there and the means to bring immediate action—the discharge petition—exists,” the Democrats said in the memo.

“Businesses both large and small have been making a very strong case” that “fixing our immigration system must be our top priority,” Rep. Suzan DelBene (D-Wash.) said during the press call. “We must do all of this understanding that we’re competing in a global marketplace for talent,” she added.

DelBene also stressed that any immigration legislation must be comprehensive, pointing to the difficulty farmers would have replacing their workforces if their undocumented workers were deported.

Rep. Steven Horsford (D-Nev.) added that H.R. 15 would be a “jolt to our labor market” that would raise wages, reduce deficits and bring the best and the brightest workers from around the world. He also said an immigration overhaul “means job creation,” not job loss for U.S. workers.

“So our Republican colleagues are really left with no excuses,” Horsford said.

Rep. Judy Chu (D-Calif.) said, “[T]his is a Hispanic and Asian issue; it's a black and a white issue; most importantly it's an American issue.”

“We need a permanent solution to this problem, and that's why Congress must pass legislation to fix our broken immigration system,” she said. “We're done waiting.”

'I Don't Know What Else We're Supposed to Do.'

“I don't know what else we're supposed to do,” Garcia said. A member of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, he spoke about the CHC's April 9 meeting with Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson over potential changes to the department's immigration enforcement policies .

Garcia said Johnson indicated that some enforcement changes could come in the next few weeks, with broader policy changes slated for later in the year.

Administrative action is necessary because the legislative timeline is “a moving target on the Republican side,” he said. First Republicans asked to give them until the end of 2013, then it was the end of the retreat at which Republican House leaders released their own immigration principles (20 DLR A-2, 1/30/14), and then it was the end of the primary elections, Garcia said.

Now Democrats are being asked to wait until the lame-duck session following the general election in November, he said.

The Senate passed its comprehensive immigration bill (S. 744)—on which H.R. 15 is modeled—nearly 300 days ago (124 DLR AA-1, 6/27/13), Garcia pointed out. That, he said, is 300 days of deportations, of employment visas not going to highly skilled workers, of foreign students at U.S. colleges and universities returning to their home countries to compete with the U.S., of billions of dollars not going to the U.S. Treasury.

Both Garcia and Horsford said they recognize that many House Republicans support an overhaul of the immigration system. “There is only one person standing in the way of us getting comprehensive immigration reform,” Horsford said, referring to Boehner.

Although the president can take some administrative action, “there is only one way to fix these issues permanently,” he said, “and that's a legislative fix.”