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Republican Ideas on Immigration Could Legalize Up to 6.5 Million, Study Says

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Between 4.4 million and 6.5 million immigrants illegally in the United States could gain an eventual pathway to citizenship under [proposals](#) being discussed by Republicans in the House of Representatives, according to an estimate [published](#) Tuesday by the National Foundation for American Policy, a nonpartisan research group in Washington.

The estimate is based on policy ideas that have been put forward by Representative Robert W. Goodlatte of Virginia, a Republican who is chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Mr. Goodlatte has said he [would not support](#) legislation with a “special” or direct pathway to citizenship for 11.5 million immigrants in the country without legal papers, such as the 13-year pathway in a broad bill the Senate passed last June.

House Republicans have rejected the sweeping approach of that bill and said they would handle immigration in smaller pieces. Speaker John A. Boehner of Ohio has said that Mr. Goodlatte is helping him to prepare principles that will guide House action on this issue this year.

Mr. Goodlatte has said he would instead offer a provisional legal status to illegal immigrants, then allow those who can demonstrate they are eligible to apply for permanent residency — a document known as a green card — through the existing system, based on sponsorship by a family member or an employer. Obtaining a green card is the crucial step toward American citizenship.

The foundation’s report, prepared by Stuart Anderson, its executive director, finds that even without major changes to current immigration law, 3.1 million to 4.4 million immigrants now illegally in the United States would be eligible for green cards because they are parents of American citizens. As many as 600,000 could gain green cards as spouses of citizens and legal residents, and up to 45,000 could receive green cards within two decades as low-skilled workers.

The estimate assumes the House would pass legislation creating new green cards for young undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children, who call themselves [Dreamers](#). Mr. Anderson calculates that 800,000 to 1.5 million of those immigrants would gain a pathway to citizenship.

Mr. Anderson’s calculation, based on figures from the Department of Homeland Security among other sources, is the first effort to put numbers on proposals emerging from House Republicans. On a conference call Tuesday with reporters, Mr. Anderson stressed that the estimates were imprecise because no Republican has so far offered a specific legalization bill.

Under the foundation's projection, at least two million immigrants would have to wait a long time — as much as two decades — before they could apply for naturalization. As many as five million immigrants would remain here with legal status but no prospect of becoming citizens.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that eight million illegal immigrants would gain a pathway to citizenship under the Senate bill. Many Democrats and immigrant advocates have rejected any legislation that excludes large groups of residents from citizenship.

Tamar Jacoby, a Republican who is president of ImmigrationWorks USA, a small-business organization that supports an overhaul of immigration laws, said on Tuesday that proposals for a bill with no separate path to citizenship for most illegal immigrants were gaining ground among House Republicans, as the basis for negotiations with the Senate. She said Mr. Anderson's estimates were higher than many immigration analysts have predicted.

“The half a loaf is more substantial than many people would have thought,” she said.

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