

# Republicans After Shutdown Seen Losing Again on Immigration

*By Lisa Lerer & Roxana Tiron - Oct 24, 2013 3:52 PM CT*

Oct. 21 (Bloomberg) -- Steve Case, chief executive officer of Revolution LLC and co-founder of America Online Inc., talks about the outlook for an overhaul of U.S. immigration laws and the need for lawmakers to work cooperatively. Case speaks with Betty Liu on Bloomberg Television's "In the Loop." (Source: Bloomberg)

"There are some Democrats who would rather get it done -- and others who would rather have the issue" linger, said Tamar Jacoby, president of ImmigrationWorks USA, a network of business groups that promotes legal immigration. "Either way, they win," said Jacoby, who has spoken with many Democratic lawmakers. "I hope Obama wants a bill."

The reluctance of some Democrats to press the issue now is only one of the hurdles facing legislation this year. A majority of House Republicans oppose providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented workers. And a White House-backed push by pro-immigration groups -- including high-technology companies eager to obtain visas for workers -- was derailed by the 16-day government shutdown and fight over the debt limit.

That confrontation, some Republicans say, further poisoned the president's relations with the party.

## **'No Discussion'**

"There's no discussion about immigration" by either party, said Texas Republican John Carter, who last month left a bipartisan House group that was working on a bill. "I have a heart for fixing immigration, but not sure the will is there."

With the fiscal crisis temporarily resolved, the president has been forced to focus on fixing website failures on his health-care law, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Speaking to reporters at the White House today, spokesman Jay Carney said the questions surrounding the health-care law shouldn't hold up progress on immigration. "There's no connection between the Affordable Care Act and comprehensive immigration reform," he said.

Obama this morning urged Congress to approve legislation, casting the bill as a way to boost the U.S. economy.

"We should pass immigration reform," the president said at a White House event. "It's good for our economy, it's good for our national security, it's good for our people, and we should do it this year."

## **Political Repercussions**

He hinted of political repercussions to come for Republicans who prevent legislation from moving forward.

“Anyone still standing in the way of this bipartisan reform should at least have to explain why,” he said. “It’s up to Republicans in the House to decide if reform becomes a reality or not.”

The fate of the legislation rests largely in the hands of House Speaker John Boehner, an Ohio Republican, who must decide whether to bring a bill to the full House.

The Senate in June passed an immigration bill on a bipartisan vote that included a path to citizenship for the country’s estimated 11 million undocumented workers.

Supporters of immigration legislation say if Obama pushes hard, it might make it tougher for Republicans to support a priority of the Democratic administration.

“If he leans into it too aggressively, it makes it harder for Republicans to get to ‘yes,’” said Frank Sharry, executive director of Washington-based America’s Voice. “He wants a result so badly that he’s willing to step back so Republicans can step forward.”

## **Immigration First**

The president has no nationwide barnstorming tour scheduled to promote the issue, according to administration officials, who asked for anonymity to discuss internal strategy.

In remarks after the partial government shutdown ended last week, Obama listed immigration first among three legislative priorities, along with action on the budget and passage of a farm bill.

He then scolded the same Republican lawmakers whose votes he’ll need for the House to approve Senate-passed legislation.

“There are folks on the other side who think that my policies are misguided,” he said. “We shouldn’t fail to act on areas that we do agree or could agree just because we don’t think it’s good politics, just because the extremes in our party don’t like the word ‘compromise.’”

## **‘Same People’**

Democrats say Republicans will suffer politically if they fail to move a bill forward. “We are going to hold Republicans accountable for everything: the bad things they do and the good things that they don’t do,” said Representative Steve Israel of New York, chairman of the House Democratic campaign committee.

Should Republicans block legislation, that would create an opening for Democrats to paint them as obstructionists, say some lawmakers, who argue that Republican opposition to a bill could be paired with the party's role in the government shutdown.

“The same people who caused the government shutdown and stopped us from opening the government for two and a half weeks are the people who are blocking immigration reform,” said Representative Joaquin Castro, a Texas Democrat.

While House Republican leaders have expressed interest in moving forward with legislation, many party lawmakers say Obama's decision not to negotiate over the shutdown and debt ceiling has soured relations.

Speaking on “Fox News Sunday,” Senator Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican, said the president's tactics undermined his efforts to build a consensus.

## **Limited Window**

“Now, this notion that they're going to get in a room and negotiate a deal with the president on immigration is much more difficult to do,” Rubio said in the Oct. 20 interview, “because of the way that president has behaved towards his opponents over the last few weeks.”

Advocates for an immigration overhaul, including Jacoby, see a limited congressional window for movement on comprehensive legislation, possibly limited to the next several weeks before new fiscal deadlines hit in the coming months.

Some Democrats have hinted that action could come further in the future, possibly in the early summer after primary election filing deadlines are past. Then, they say, Republicans will begin turning their focus to the general election, making them more eager to take up the legislation as a way to woo Hispanic voters in battleground states such as Florida, Nevada and [Colorado](#).

“I'm going to do everything I can to get it done this year,” Senate Majority leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat, told Univision television on Oct. 18. “But remember this is a two-year Congress.”

## **Coalition Lobbies**

A coalition of business groups, religious leaders and agricultural companies has spent much of the year lobbying for legislation. Next week, the Partnership for a New American Economy, an association of mayors and business leaders, is flying in 400 business, religious and technology leaders to make the case for a bill on Capitol Hill. They're targeting House Republicans from more than 20 states.

Anti-tax activist Grover Norquist, the American Farm Bureau, the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, FWD.US, an advocacy group co-

founded by [Facebook Inc. \(FB\)](#) Chief Executive Officer [Mark Zuckerberg](#), and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce will join them for a rally in urging Republicans to take action.

The Partnership for a New American Economy was formed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the founder and majority owner of Bloomberg News parent Bloomberg LP.

## **‘Conservative Movement’**

“The goal is to say. ‘Look, this is the conservative movement,’” said Jeremy Robbins, director of the Partnership for a New American Economy. “This is good for the economy, it’s good for America and it’s good for the party.”

Boehner has said the House won’t back the Senate bill and instead will take action on smaller-scale measures. Speaking to reporters in [Washington](#) yesterday, he said he’s still hopeful the House will move on legislation. Senate leaders say they won’t support scaled-down bills.

The House Judiciary Committee has approved legislation dealing with enforcement, employment verification, and agricultural and high-skilled workers.

California Republican Darrell Issa, the chairman of the House Oversight panel, is working on a proposal that would offer temporary legal status to qualifying undocumented immigrants, according to spokesman Frederick Hill.

Lawmakers will also need to shift to the budget as deadlines approach in December, January and February for funding the government and raising the debt ceiling. Representative Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican, said an immigration revamp is “dead” until Democrats and Republicans resolve those issues.

The bitterness left over from the recent budget battle will be hard to overcome, say some lawmakers.

“He’s tried to destroy the Republican Party,” Representative Raul Labrador, an Idaho Republican, said of Obama, at a forum of Republicans on Oct. 16. “Anything we do right now with this president on immigration will be with that same goal in mind, which is to destroy the Republican Party and not to get good policies.”

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