

Republicans Name Hardliner to Head House Immigration Subcommittee

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Published December 19, 2012

Fox News Latino

Washington, D.C. – House Republicans have chosen another hardliner to help shape the legislative body's approach to immigration, naming Rep. Trey Gowdy chairman of the immigration subcommittee.

The naming of Gowdy, a Republican from South Carolina, comes just weeks after another Republican hardliner, Rep. Bob Goodlatte, of Virginia, was named chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, which oversees immigration.

Both Gowdy and Goodlatte have earned their credentials as strict on immigration policy, frowning on proposals and programs, such as the DREAM Act, that give a break to undocumented immigrants. Both consider most such proposals "amnesty," and long have vowed not to support them.

The selection of chairmen of these committees is significant; it comes at a time when President Obama has vowed to push forward comprehensive immigration reform. And House Speaker John Boehner, long hawkish on immigration, said to reporters after the election that the "issue has been around far too long."

"A comprehensive approach is long overdue," continued Boehner, who in the past had expressed misgivings over a comprehensive approach that would include some relief to undocumented immigrants.

"I'm confident that the president, myself, others can find the common ground to take care of this issue once and for all."

Obama often has blamed Republicans in Congress for hindering efforts to reform immigration in a way that would both tighten enforcement and provide a pathway to legalization for millions of undocumented immigrants.

Republicans, in turn, have blamed Obama for making hollow promises about immigration reform in an effort to curry favor with Latino voters. Latinos turned out in record numbers in November to participate in the presidential election; more than 70 percent voted for Obama. Many Latino community leaders and political experts attributed the overwhelming support by the voting bloc for Obama to Republicans' seemingly harsh rhetoric on immigration, which struck many Latinos as hostile to them.

Gowdy's selection drew praise from those who support a hard line on immigration. Many conservatives fear that Obama's popularity with Latino voters in the election will drive Republicans to compromise on immigration and back measures that offer some leniency to undocumented immigrants.

"What it suggests is that the House Republicans aren't going to allow themselves to be stampeded by this amnesty panic because Gowdy is pretty hawkish on immigration," said a statement on the website of Americans for Legal Immigration, a group that favors strict immigration policies.

But groups that advocate for immigration laws that would give undocumented immigrants a chance to legalize expressed concern about Gowdy's selection, especially following that of Goodlatte.

Frank Sharry, head of America's Voice, which supports legalizing some undocumented immigrants, was quoted by USA Today as saying: "If the Republican Party wants to get right on immigration reform that puts 11 million immigrants on the road to citizenship I suspect they'll have to go around [Gowdy] or over him."

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