The immigration overhaul passed last week by the Senate—the biggest piece of domestic legislation to be considered this year—now moves to the House, where its prospects are widely said to be "uncertain." Which is to say, it's in trouble.

In fact, the Senate's version of an immigration bill has no chance of House approval. The House may pass its own, different version, but even that is an iffy proposition.

To understand why, consider the most important fact of political life in the capital these days: If the Washington establishment is from Mars, the Republican caucus in the House is from Venus.

Many House Republicans—particularly the younger freshmen and sophomore members who now make up a stunning 46% of the caucus—don't much care what conventional wisdom says they should do. They are happy to rock the boat.

Two weeks ago, conventional wisdom said, as the majority party, House Republicans simply had to muster the votes needed to pass a farm bill despite misgivings about its size and shape. Instead, 62 House Republicans rebelled and voted against it because of its cost, and the bill failed.

Now, conventional wisdom says the national Republican Party's imperative to build bridges to Hispanic voters, as well as business-community support, means House Republicans must pass a comprehensive immigration bill. Yet that simply isn't the way the world looks to many House Republicans.

They come from districts where the concerns of the national party don't matter much, and the concerns of liberals who want a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants matter even less.

In other words, they come from very red districts, many of which have gotten more red since the redistricting that followed the 2010 Census.

Their constituents are predominantly conservative and predominantly white. A Wall Street Journal analysis shows that only 38 of the 234 House Republicans—just over 16%—come from districts where Latinos account for 20% or more of the population.

Their districts also are heavily Republican. Indeed, 42 Republican House members won with more than 70% of the vote last year. (The same is true in reverse for Democrats in the polarized House, by the way; 83 of them come from districts so blue they won with more than 70% of the vote.)

By the same token, very few House Republicans come from the kinds of swing districts where they have to worry a lot about what President Barack Obama wants. Just 17 of the
234 House Republicans elected last year come from districts where Mr. Obama carried the presidential vote.

In such heavily conservative districts, writes analyst David Wasserman of the Cook Political Report, "the overwhelming share of House Republicans will have more to fear from a 2014 primary than a 2014 general election."

Against that backdrop, it's instructive to look at that June 20 vote in which the House defied history by defeating the farm bill, a measure with a mix of coveted farm subsidies and food-stamp funding that has always been enough to make it politically irresistible.

One member who bucked those expectations—and seemingly his own political interests—to vote against the bill was conservative Republican Rep. Tim Huelskamp of Kansas. Mr. Huelskamp is a farmer, and he represents Kansas' "Big First" district, a giant swath of central and western Kansas that is larger than some states and that receives the second highest per-capita share of farm subsidies of any district in the nation.

Yet he spurned the wishes of his own party's leaders by voting against the farm bill and its agriculture subsidies. He complained that almost 80% of its funding goes to a food-stamp program that is mushrooming in size and cost to the federal government. The second-term lawmaker led a revolt by like-minded young conservatives who considered the bill an example of government spending gone overboard, whatever its other virtues; 13 of 36 House freshmen also voted no.

"People said the old deal was that all these people from agricultural districts are just going to vote for a farm bill," Mr. Huelskamp said in an interview. "Well, no. I'm not going to go for 80% for food stamps to get the 20% for us."

Has that vote created problems among all the farmers and agriculture interests back home? "I haven't really had much pushback," he said. "What I'm hearing from home is, 'What we expect you to do, Tim, is we expect you to get Congress out of the rut we've been in.' "

Mr. Huelskamp has defied his party's own leaders so openly that he's been kicked off the Agriculture Committee. That did cause some dismay among agriculture interests back home. On the other hand, he was unopposed in winning re-election last year. Which is worth keeping in mind if you assume the House will pass an immigration bill just because it's expected to.