

WALL STREET JOURNAL

HOUSE REPUBLICANS DRAFTING IMMIGRATION MEASURES

By Kristina Peterson
October 22, 2013

House Republicans' approach to overhauling the immigration system piece by piece so far hasn't included any bills tackling the problem of what to do with the 11 million illegal immigrants already living in the U.S. That could change soon.

At least two measures are currently being drafted to address the thorniest part of an immigration rewrite: how to handle the immigrants who either came to the U.S. illegally or overstayed their visas. It's a controversial issue that few in the GOP-controlled House have until now wanted to stake out, as chances of the chamber passing immigration legislation have narrowed.

Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R., Fla.) and a small group of other lawmakers are working on one proposal that includes elements of – but is expected to diverge from – a bipartisan plan Mr. Diaz-Balart had worked on earlier this year. A group of four Democrats and four Republicans in the House had sought to craft a broad immigration bill, but the three other Republicans dropped out, scuttling the group's chances of introducing their plan.

Mr. Diaz-Balart said his group's latest proposal will emphasize tough border security and measures that can be strictly enforced. The bill will offer illegal immigrants a way to "get right with the law" while addressing the problematic legal status of the 11 million, he said.

"One of the things we keep hearing is folks that broke the law – whether they overstayed their visa or crossed the border unlawfully – they cannot have more or additional rights than folks who have been doing everything patiently and legally," he said in an interview Tuesday.

Some House Republicans, as well as advocates of a broad immigration overhaul, have previously said they might be able to support legislation that granted no "special path to citizenship" for illegal immigrants living in the U.S., but could enable some to eventually become citizens.

The broad immigration bill passed by the Senate in June would make most of the 11 million people here illegally eligible for green cards, or legal permanent residency, after a set period of time, which automatically gives someone the chance to apply for citizenship.

Meanwhile, Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.) is also working on a proposal that would offer temporary legal status to qualifying illegal immigrants, his spokesman said Tuesday.

House GOP leaders haven't said yet when they plan to start bringing some of the immigration bills that have already been approved by the House Judiciary and Homeland Security committees to the floor. House lawmakers are still working on measures addressing other corners of the immigration system, including expanding the number of annual visas for low-skilled workers.