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## ADVOCATES FOR IMMIGRATION BILL ARE TAKING A NEW TACK

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Dwindling prospects for a sweeping congressional immigration bill have some supporters pivoting to a more confrontational approach, while at least one industry is looking for a backup plan if a broader deal fails.

New ads from the AFL-CIO and Service Employees International Union take a sharper tone toward Republicans, particularly those vulnerable to Democratic challengers next year, over House inaction on immigration bills. The AFL-CIO ads, mostly running in Spanish, recite inflammatory language toward immigrants from some GOP lawmakers and urge viewers to “fight the hate.”

Some farm groups are looking for a niche fix addressing their concerns if a wider deal isn’t reached. And President Barack Obama has begun speaking regularly on immigration after months of remaining quiet at the request of supporters in Congress who argued that Republicans are less likely to pass a bill that the president is pushing. Last month, Mr. Obama began a public push along with private meetings with outside groups. On Wednesday, Mr. Obama and other senior officials will meet with evangelical and other religious leaders on backing an immigration overhaul. The meeting follows a similar one last week with business leaders.

The result is a transformation from a unified group of advocates to something more fractured, with some focused hard on pushing for legislation and others starting to shift to a political effort that hopes to take seats from Republicans they can try to blame if an overhaul fails.

The broad and bipartisan bill that passed the Senate over the summer includes measures favored by unions as well as high-tech, agriculture and other industries, as well as a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants demanded by immigrant advocates. In the GOP-led House, five bills have cleared committees, but the chamber’s leaders have brought none of them to the floor.

Last week, House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R., Calif.) told immigration activists that the House wouldn’t take up the issue this year, one of the activists said. Mr. McCarthy’s office declined to comment.

The languid pace in the House has bred anxiety among crop and dairy farmers, many of whom rely on immigrant laborers. They had been focused on passing a comprehensive bill covering a number of areas of immigration law because Democrats have made clear they wouldn’t move one piece without the others.

If a broad immigration bill stalls, “we have an obligation” to look for a plan “that at least addresses the agricultural portion,” said Jerry Kozak, president of the National Milk Producers Federation, a trade group representing dairy farmers. The agricultural-visa system now provides permits for seasonal jobs, while the industry says dairy farmers require year-round labor.

Over lunch with farmers from his home state of Florida, Republican Rep. Tom Rooney said he asked, "What is our Plan B?" He said he also told the farmers: "We need to start game-planning for what we should do if – and I would likely say when – immigration fails."

One suggestion advanced by the group: Turn over handling of the agricultural guest-worker program to the Agriculture Department from the Labor Department in order to speed up processing of visa applications.

Unions, meanwhile, are now asserting that the GOP will pay a price at the polls next year for inaction. "Time is running out on the Republicans," said Eliseo Medina of the SEIU. "We want people to know who's standing in the way of reform."

Unions, meanwhile, are working to pressure the GOP to pass legislation – and if that fails, try to punish Republicans at the polls in 2014. Until now, advocates of a broad immigration overhaul had kept their criticism of the GOP muted in an effort to help create political space for the party to consider immigration bills.

The SEIU and AFL-CIO are also participating in a voter-contact program in nine GOP-held congressional districts. Targets include California Rep. David Valadao, a rare Republican to sign onto Democratic immigration legislation. Union leaders say they are trying to pressure him into pressing GOP leaders.

Mr. Valadao shrugged off the labor group's ads, saying in an interview that the strategy might help jump-start the debate. "If there's enough members to talk to [House] leadership and say, 'We need to have this debate; we need to move this process forward,' that's very helpful," he said.