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RYAN: HOUSE WON'T GET 'JAMMED' WITH IMMIGRATION BILL

By Damian Paletta
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House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) said House Republican leaders would pursue an overhaul of the immigration system in a step-by-step process, likely beginning next year, but said lawmakers would not allow themselves to get "jammed" by a bill that passed the Senate earlier this year.

Mr. Ryan, speaking at a Wall Street Journal CEO Council meeting, said the House would likely try to advance seven or eight bills, all dealing with immigration. He said this was in part meant as a way to avoid creating a large piece of legislation that was overly cumbersome.

"No offense to the [Obama] administration, we just don't trust their word on this," he said. He also said there is "literally not enough time to do it" in 2013.

"If we are trying to cram and rush just because it's the calendar year, we don't think that's responsible," he said.

He also said he believed there were a number of House Republicans who would support the ability immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally to eventually secure citizenship. But he said the process would be burdensome and drawn out – potentially taking up to 15 years – incentivizing immigrants to enter the U.S. legally. The Senate bill, which House leaders have rejected, would provide a 13-year path to citizenship.

Separately, Mr. Ryan said he would continue negotiating with Senate Democrats to try and reach a budget agreement, but he didn't express optimism that a deal was within reach. He said Democrats would not agree to any changes to entitlement programs as part of budget negotiations "in any shape or form."

Mr. Ryan and Senate Budget Committee Chairman Patty Murray (D., Wash.) are trying to reach a budget agreement in the coming weeks. If they broker a deal, it would make it much easier for congressional appropriators to write spending bills that fund the government. Lawmakers face a Jan. 15, 2014 deadline, which is when the current funding bill expires. If an agreement isn't reached in time, the government could face another shutdown.

"We do not have an agreement," he said. "We do have differences of opinion."

He said, if necessary, Republicans would simply pursue a spending bill that funded the government at reduced levels through the end of the fiscal year, Sept. 30, 2014. He said he would continue working with Democrats to try to reach an agreement, but he suggested they weren't close to a deal.

"We'll take the spending cuts we've got and we'll take the fiscal discipline we have," he said.

Mr. Ryan was adamant that Republicans would not allow another government shutdown or more brinkmanship over the debt ceiling when they face new deadlines in 2014.

"I do not believe you will have the kind of theatrics" on the debt ceiling that occurred during the government shutdown in October, Mr. Ryan said.

He wouldn't say how the Republican party would approach the controversial debt ceiling issue in 2014, however.