

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

## HOUSE IMMIGRATION BILLS ARE STILL IN THE MIX

Wall Street Journal

April 17, 2014

Speaker John Boehner and other senior House Republicans are telling donors and industry groups that they aim to pass immigration legislation this year, despite the reluctance of many Republicans to tackle the divisive issue before the November elections.

Many lawmakers and activists have assumed the issue was off the table in an election year. But Mr. Boehner said at a Las Vegas fundraiser last month he was "hellbent on getting this done this year," according to two people in the room.

A spokesman for Mr. Boehner didn't dispute the account but said no action is possible until President Barack Obama proves himself a trustworthy partner to Republicans.

Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R., Va.), chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, delivered an upbeat message about legislative prospects during a recent trip to Silicon Valley, said Carl Guardino, chief executive of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, who hosted his visit.

He said Mr. Goodlatte told him action in 2014 was "entirely possible," likely in the form of votes this summer on five to seven immigration bills. A spokeswoman for Mr. Goodlatte declined to comment on the exchange.

Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R., Fla.) also is drafting legislation that would give qualifying undocumented immigrants legal status and the chance to apply for citizenship through existing channels. The bill includes border-security measures and an effort to clear the backlog of applications for permanent legal status, known as green cards.

House leaders have told Mr. Diaz-Balart to have the legislation ready to go for possible debate in June or July, an aide said.

One issue that could impact the timetable in Congress is a review of deportation policy now under way by the Department of Homeland Security, at Mr. Obama's direction.

A senior administration official said some modest fixes are expected within the coming weeks. But in a meeting with lawmakers, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said other changes could come later in the year if the House continues to stall on legislation, congressional aides said.

That could serve to energize frustrated Hispanic voters ahead of the midterm elections, but Republicans say it would kill the chances for congressional action.

In public, tensions remain high between Mr. Obama and congressional Republicans. On Wednesday, Mr. Obama called Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R., Va.) to discuss immigration. The president said it was a "very pleasant" conversation, but earlier in the day, Mr. Obama had issued a statement admonishing the House GOP for not acting on immigration. Mr. Cantor seized on that in his own statement which accused Mr. Obama of not knowing how to work with Congress.

"The only way to truly fix it is through congressional action," Mr. Obama said a news conference Thursday. "We have already tried to take as many administrative steps as we could." But he added: "We're going to review it one more time."

The Senate passed a sweeping immigration bill last summer, but the House has yet to act. Early this year, Mr. Boehner raised hopes of immigration supporters by introducing a set of principles to guide legislation.

A week later, the speaker said GOP distrust of Mr. Obama would make it difficult to act this year. Since then, many have assumed there was little chance of House action in 2014.

The immigration issue is politically challenging, because some core Republican supporters are adamantly opposed, particularly to giving safe harbor to people in the U.S. illegally.

Just this month, opponents succeeded in blocking, at least temporarily, an effort to let people brought to the U.S. illegally as children earn green cards by serving in the military.

Other House Republicans are comfortable with Mr. Boehner's principles for changing immigration law, but worry that conducting a legislative debate would divide the party ahead of an election.

Republicans who want to move legislation are at odds over timing. Some argue that next year offers a better window for action, because Republicans will be more focused on the 2016 presidential election, when support from Hispanics would be important to the party's nominee.

But increasingly, GOP lobbyists and some congressional staff say the task might grow harder if the party waits.

If Republicans win control of the Senate, for example, Sen. Charles Grassley (R., Iowa), who is widely seen as opposing an immigration overhaul, would be slated to lead the Judiciary Committee, which handles immigration.

Many in the business community have shifted their lobbying to emphasize this point, several lobbyists said.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Grassley said that he opposed the Senate's bipartisan bill, in part because amendments he believed would have improved the measure were rejected.