

WALL STREET JOURNAL

ANOTHER SNAG FOR HOUSE IMMIGRATION BILL

By Laura Meckler
September 4, 2013

For years, a bipartisan group in the House has been working to introduce a comprehensive immigration bill. As lawmakers left Washington for the August recess, people involved in the process said the legislation was finally complete and it was now up to the three Republican members of the group whether to actually introduce it.

It turns out that it's not ready after all. Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart (R., Fla.) said in an interview that he spent much of August talking with many of his fellow Republicans, trying to persuade a majority of the House GOP to support an immigration bill. House Speaker John Boehner (R., Ohio) has said he will not bring a bill to the floor that does not have support of a majority of Republicans.

Mr. Diaz-Balart said he is optimistic that he can bring the required 117 Republicans on board his group's bill. But first, he said, some changes are needed.

He said Republicans worry about two things: that the pathway to citizenship contemplated for some 11 million people now in the country illegally will give illegal immigrants opportunities that aren't available to those who used existing legal channels. He also wants to create some sort of provision that would force President Barack Obama to enforce the bill's provisions to address what he called a "deep distrust" of the administration.

"We need to tweak the bill to address these points," he said. "We need to get a majority of the Republicans, and people (in the GOP) have serious concerns about those two issues in the bipartisan bill."

The hope has been that the bipartisan House bill can give momentum to the lagging effort to move legislation through the House that can then be compromised with the bill passed by the Senate in June. It's also been viewed as a possible Plan B if House leaders fail in their effort to pass smaller immigration bills one at a time, taking on different aspects of the issue.

Immigration advocates believe that events held throughout the August recess went well for them, but they face an uphill battle. The Republican leadership has no plans—at least at the moment—to bring any sort of immigration bill to the House floor.

Still, Mr. Diaz-Balart says he is more optimistic than ever about moving a bill over the finish line. "I feel like a lot of good things are happening," he said.