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GOP PUSHING QUICKER DEPORTATIONS

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Republican lawmakers on Wednesday called for a change in law so that many children crossing the U.S. border could be deported more quickly, and some said the change should be a condition of approving President Barack Obama's request for \$3.7 billion to stem a surge in minors entering the country.

A group appointed by House Speaker John Boehner (R., Ohio) as well as some rank-and-file Republicans said they would push to revise a 2008 law when considering Mr. Obama's funding request to address what he has called an "urgent humanitarian situation" on the border. The president has asked for more flexibility with the law, and on Wednesday, he suggested the changes be included in the emergency spending bill.

"If we're going to allow money to go to solve the current crisis, we've got to make some policy changes to make sure it doesn't recur," said Rep. Joe Heck (R., Nev.). "The president should move forward with his request for the change in the law that allows more expeditious return."

But some Democrats are wary of the change and said the border situation couldn't be quickly resolved just by turning away migrants. "It's very clear that many of these children and families are fleeing violence, and to send them back could mean to send them back into a harmful or potentially deadly situation," said Rep. Beto O'Rourke, one of five Texas Democrats who represent districts on the border with Mexico.

In remarks in Dallas on Wednesday, Mr. Obama urged Congress to pass his request for additional funding and said he had asked Texas Gov. Rick Perry during a meeting to lobby the Texas congressional delegation to back the proposal. Mr. Obama said the package would allow the administration to follow up on steps that Mr. Perry and others want to see taken, such as additional patrol agents on the border and faster administrative proceedings to consider deportation cases.

"This is an issue which my Republican friends have said is urgent and we need to fix it. And if that's the case, let's go ahead and fix it," Mr. Obama said.

The 2008 law, signed by President George W. Bush, aimed to protect children from human trafficking. It requires that migrant children other than those from Mexico and Canada be placed with sponsors in the U.S. while waiting for a court to hear their deportation cases—waits that can extend for years.

The group set up by Mr. Boehner to review the border crisis said in its statement Wednesday that the children should be "returned to their home countries in the most humane way possible," which would require "a revision" to the 2008 law. In a closed-door conference of House Republicans, Mr. Boehner said Wednesday he hoped to deal with the border crisis before Congress's August break, a GOP aide said.

But some Democrats said Wednesday that alterations to the law would be unnecessary or unwelcome.

"I don't think we should change that law," said Rep. Filemon Vela (D., Texas). He said he wanted to make the deportation process more efficient but was worried that altering the 2008 law could hinder courts' abilities to carefully weigh whether children can remain in the U.S.

While Republicans and the White House want to change the law, they may approach the issue differently.

Some Republicans are talking about eliminating the requirement that children from countries other than Mexico and Canada have their cases heard by immigration courts, while the White House has suggested it simply wants authority for the secretary of Homeland Security to waive this provision as needed.

Appearing before the Senate Homeland Security Committee on Wednesday, Thomas Winkowski of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency said he supported changing the 2008 law in order to more quickly process deportation cases. "It takes time to get to a point of removal in some of these cases," he said. "That's part of the challenge we have."

Attention to the legal rights of migrants also arose Wednesday as civil-rights groups filed a lawsuit that faults the U.S. government for not providing legal representation to children facing deportation hearings. The suit, filed in U.S. District Court in Seattle by the American Civil Liberties Union and other groups, seeks to require agencies to provide children with legal representation at deportation hearings.

Such children aren't guaranteed lawyers at their hearings, though some obtain them through nonprofit groups or other means.

The surge of minors at the border has altered the traditional dynamics of immigration. Mr. Obama had hoped this year to sign a liberalization of immigration law, but he is now aligned with Republicans in pressing for new tools to hasten deportations of certain migrants.

At the same time, the president's request for new funding has put him at odds with some lawmakers and many advocates for immigrants who worked with him on a broad overhaul of immigration law.

Some advocates for immigrants say that the funding request, which would pay for new detention facilities and immigration judges, among other enforcement measures, focuses too much on detention and deportation and not enough on resolving problems that prompted people to flee their home countries.

Republicans said Mr. Obama had work to do with Democrats to convince them the 2008 law needed to be changed. "He needs to get his own team coordinated before asking us," said Rep. Steve Pearce of New Mexico, the only House Republican to represent a border district.