



## RUBIO'S NEW TONE ON IMMIGRATION LOUD AND CLEAR

By Laura Meckler  
August 28, 2014

If there is any doubt that Sen. Marco Rubio (R., Fla.) has changed his tone on immigration, it was extinguished this week.

He says an Obama administration program that protects young illegal immigrants from deportation should end. He says Congress should put off any legislation addressing the undocumented immigrants until border security and other reforms are in place. And he says he wouldn't vote for the Senate immigration bill he helped write if it were on the floor today.

Asked directly how he would vote if Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid brought the same bill to the floor now, he said he would vote no because passing the bill now wouldn't be productive.

"At this point, bringing the Senate bill back to the floor would be a show vote," he said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal. "It would set us back even further – taking an issue that's already divided people and actually going to stir the pot and poison the well even further. Why would I support an effort to do that?"

In a series of interviews – some with conservative media outlets such as Breitbart.com – and in a letter to President Barack Obama, Mr. Rubio is talking tougher than ever on immigration. It's a striking contrast to his support last year of the Senate bill, which offered a path to citizenship for qualifying illegal immigrants. That bill proved toxic with House Republicans, and amid a battering from conservatives, Mr. Rubio, who is mulling a 2016 presidential run, soon backed off from his support.

In his interview with the Journal, the Florida Republican said he still supports immigration reform, and a spokesman made clear that Mr. Rubio doesn't regret his support for last year's Senate bill, which also called for enhanced border security and an overhaul to the legal visa system.

But his letter to Mr. Obama, sent Tuesday, Mr. Rubio says Congress should abandon efforts to pass a comprehensive bill. He also backed off the idea of "piecemeal" legislation, where different parts of the immigration system are tackled in individual bills. Instead, he said the matter should be addressed in "sequential" pieces of legislation.

Under this vision, lawmakers would first pass enforcement measures, then legislation to modernize the legal system for visas. Only after those two pieces were in place would Congress take up legislation addressing those already in the U.S. illegally, he said.

Immigration rights advocates and their supporters in Congress oppose that approach, saying that the undocumented should not have to wait for aid. They also fear Congress would stop after tackling the politically easier elements of immigration.

But Mr. Rubio says it's the only way to move legislation through Congress. "I don't think we'll have the votes to get to the third step until we do the first two," he said in the interview.

Immigration legislation died in the GOP-controlled House this year. Some Republicans opposed the idea of "amnesty" for lawbreakers and some wanted to avoid a divisive fight in an election year.

As a result, Mr. Obama is now considering executive action to shelter and give work permits some undocumented immigrants from deportation. In his letter, Mr. Rubio warned him that such an action would kill any chance for immigration legislation "for the foreseeable future."

In the Breitbart interview, he raised the possibility of using the budget to force a showdown over the issue if Mr. Obama takes sweeping executive action on immigration.

"There will have to be some sort of a budget vote or a continuing resolution vote, so I assume there will be some sort of a vote on this," he said. "I'm interested to see what kinds of ideas my colleagues have about using funding mechanisms to address this issue."

Some read that as raising the possibility of a government shutdown, but a spokesman for Mr. Rubio said the senator wasn't implying that he would consider such a move.

Mr. Rubio also says he wants to end a program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which gives safe harbor and work permits to some people brought to the U.S. as children. He said the government should cut off new enrollments in the coming months and, at some point, end protections for those in the program now.

"Eventually at some point, that program, at some point in the future, will have to come to an end," he said in the Journal interview. "It cannot be an indefinite policy of the United States." He said it should end even if legislation has not passed to offer these people permanent protections. "The policy cannot be that an entire category of people is exempt from the applications of our laws."

Mr. Rubio also appears to be taking a different tone when confronted by protesters.

During a speech in South Carolina on Monday, he admonished young illegal immigrants who call themselves Dreamers that they are hurting their cause.

"We are a sovereign country that deserves to have immigration laws," Mr. Rubio said at a "Faith and Freedom" fundraiser on Monday, according to a CNN account. "You're doing harm to your own cause because you don't have a right to illegally immigrate to the United States." He waited for them to be escorted from the room.

That's a striking contrast to how he replied to similar protesters at the Hispanic Leadership Network conference in 2012. At that event, he asked security to let the protesters stay.

"These young people are very brave to be here today. They raise a very legitimate issue," he said. "I don't want them to leave. I want them to stay."

In his Journal interview, he said the difference between then and now is that he has proven that he is willing to address their concerns but doesn't appear to be getting any credit for it.

"I've actually done as much as anyone to address their concern," he said. "I'm trying to lay out a path forward to reach a result. These groups don't seem willing to give any consideration of that."