

WALL STREET JOURNAL

HOUSE GROUP CLOSE TO DEAL ON IMMIGRATION PROPOSAL

By Corey Boles
April 19, 2013

WASHINGTON—A bipartisan group of House lawmakers are close to finalizing an agreement on an immigration proposal that its backers hope will form the basis of House legislation aimed at overhauling the country's immigration laws, one of the lawmakers in the group said.

Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, Republican from Florida, said the group has already drafted legislation, and is currently working on resolving some technical issues before a bill is finalized. He said that House leaders have been shown the draft bill as have relevant committee chairmen and top ranking Democrats.

"I would tell you that we're really, really close," Mr. Diaz-Balart said in an interview.

The GOP lawmaker is one of eight House members – four Democrats and four Republicans – who have been working since the November elections to reach a broad agreement on changes to the immigration regime.

In keeping with an agreement among the lawmakers not to discuss the bill publicly until it is finalized, Mr. Diaz Balart wouldn't comment on the details of the group's proposal. He would say there would likely be differences between a House bill, and the Senate legislation that was introduced this week.

"The American people are demanding that we have real, strict effective border control and border security as well as not repeating the mistakes of 1986 where border enforcement and interior enforcement were promised but never delivered," Mr. Diaz Balart said when asked about the substance of the proposal. "I think it would be detrimental to have a group of people in the U.S. who are legal and permanent residents who would never an opportunity to pledge allegiance to the flag."

He did say that even when an agreement is reached, the group might wait before formally introducing a bill, working instead to build support for it behind the scenes.

The other lawmakers involved in the House group are Democratic Reps. Xavier Becerra and Zoe Lofgren of California, Luis Gutierrez of Illinois and John Yarmuth of Kentucky; and Republican Reps. John Carter and Sam Johnson of Texas and Raul Labrador of Idaho.

An aide to one of the Democratic lawmakers said the group was very close to reaching an agreement that would allow the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants to "get right with the law", take action to secure the border, and bring forward proposals that would benefit both families and businesses. That aide also wouldn't discuss further specifics, citing the group's desire to maintain confidentiality until the bill was completed.

So far, House leaders haven't said how they intend to proceed on any effort to overhaul immigration laws. House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio said on Thursday that he was encouraged by the release of the Senate bill and that both the House group of lawmakers

and the House Judiciary Committee were making progress on the issue. He said that House GOP leaders had been holding information sessions for rank-and-file lawmakers who haven't served in Congress long enough to have dealt with earlier attempts at overhauling immigration laws.

A bipartisan group of Senate lawmakers released their sweeping legislative proposal on Wednesday morning after months of negotiations. That bill would include an eventual pathway to citizenship, but only after a series of "triggers" are met to enhance border security. The Senate Judiciary Committee held an initial hearing on that bill on Friday, and leadership aides hope to advance an immigration bill to the Senate floor in May.