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IMMIGRATION LAW CHANGES SEEN CUTTING BILLIONS FROM DEFICIT

By Ashley Parker
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WASHINGTON — Congressional budget analysts, providing a positive economic assessment of proposed immigration law changes, said Tuesday that legislation to overhaul the nation's immigration system would cut close to \$1 trillion from the federal deficit over the next two decades and lead to more than 10 million new legal residents in the country.

A long-awaited analysis by the Congressional Budget Office found that the benefits of an increase in legal residents from immigration legislation currently being debated in the Senate — which includes a pathway to citizenship — would outweigh the costs. While the report was a clear victory for immigration proponents, it came just hours after Speaker John A. Boehner raised potential new obstacles for the bill, saying he would not bring any immigration measure to the floor unless it had the support of a majority of House Republicans.

The report estimates that in the first decade after the immigration bill is carried out, the net effect of adding millions of additional taxpayers would decrease the federal budget deficit by \$197 billion. Over the next decade, the report found, the deficit reduction would be even greater — an estimated \$700 billion, from 2024 to 2033. The deficit reduction figures for the first decade do not take into account \$22 billion in the discretionary spending required to implement the bill, however, making the savings slightly lower.

The report was immediately seized on by backers of the bill as a significant boost to its prospects. Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, one of the bill's authors, said the report "debunks the idea that immigration reform is anything other than a boon to our economy."

The budget office also found that in the next decade the legislation would lead to a net increase of about 10.4 million permanent legal residents and 1.6 million temporary workers and their dependents, as well as a decrease of about 1.6 million unauthorized residents.

Conservatives had expected that an analysis of the second decade — when immigrants would begin to qualify for federal benefits — would bolster their argument that the costs of an immigration overhaul were unwieldy, but that turned out not to be the case in the economic analysis.

Senator Jeff Sessions, Republican of Alabama, a leading opponent of the bill, said that its authors used "scoring gimmicks" in order to conceal the "true cost from taxpayers." "As a result, the score effectively conceals some of the biggest long-term costs to taxpayers contained in this legislation, including providing illegal immigrants with Medicaid, food stamps and cash welfare," Mr. Sessions said.

Earlier Tuesday, Mr. Boehner, Republican of Ohio, tried to put to rest discussion that he would consider pushing through an immigration bill with a combination of Democrats and a

minority of receptive Republicans in the House, where conservative Republican sentiment runs strongly against allowing those who entered the country illegally to qualify for legal status.

"I also suggested to our members today that any immigration reform bill that is going to go into law ought to have a majority of both parties' support if we're really serious about making that happen, and so I don't see any way of bringing an immigration bill to the floor that doesn't have a majority support of Republicans," Mr. Boehner said at a news conference after meeting with House Republicans.

Mr. Boehner's comments, both privately in the meeting at the Capitol Hill Club and publicly, came as some House Republicans have begun to draw a firm and vocal line in the sand, warning Mr. Boehner that his speakership could be at risk if he tries to force through an immigration bill without his conference's support.

In an interview with World Net Daily radio on Monday, Representative Dana Rohrabacher, Republican of California, said Mr. Boehner "should be removed as speaker" if, on immigration, he violates the "Hastert rule" — an unofficial principle named for J. Dennis Hastert, a former Republican speaker who would rarely allow a vote on a bill that did not have the support of a majority of his conference.

Though Mr. Boehner has passed measures with a minority of Republicans several times this year — to help avert a fiscal showdown, provide relief for victims of Hurricane Sandy and pass the Violence Against Women Act — he explicitly said on Tuesday that he would not take up an immigration bill without the support of a majority of his party.

Mr. Boehner's comments will make it harder for him to buck conservatives on an immigration overhaul, something that many party leaders consider crucial for Republicans hoping to regain their national standing with Hispanic voters. His position will also make it harder to strike a deal between the House and the Senate on a final immigration measure if the legislative process gets that far.

In insisting on a measure that most of his members can support, Mr. Boehner is calling for legislation that is likely to contain border security requirements and limits on attaining legal status that many Democrats and other proponents of new legislation will resist.

Mr. Boehner is well aware of the difficult political situation he finds himself in. When asked if he believed he could lose his job if he violated the Hastert rule on immigration, he said, to laughter, "Maybe." Mr. Boehner would not initially say whether he would also require majority Republican support on any legislation to emerge from negotiations with the Senate over a final bill.

"We'll see when we get there," he said. But his staff later clarified that he would not violate the Hastert rule on anything coming out of conference, either.

Mr. Boehner's comments come as conservative Republicans are increasingly worried about how the immigration bill will be handled in the House. Representative Steve King, Republican of Iowa, a leading opponent of the immigration overhaul making its way through the Senate, plans to hold a six-hour news conference outside the Capitol on Wednesday to voice his concerns about the current bill. The House continued a piecemeal approach to immigration changes with the Republican-led House Judiciary Committee formally drafting a measure opposed by Democrats that would grant states and localities the authority to enforce federal immigration laws.