BOEHNER PROMISES TO TACKLE IMMIGRATION 'IN CHUNKS'

By Neil King Jr.
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House Speaker John Boehner reaffirmed that House Republicans planned to take a gradual, "step by step" approach to overhauling the country's immigration system, but he didn't put the quest at the top of his list of legislative priorities for the year.

Speaking on CBS's "Face the Nation," the Ohio Republican criticized the bipartisan Senate bill approved in June as both overly sweeping and lacking in sufficient border controls. House Republicans, he said, would try to tackle the problem "in chunks."

In listing his top priorities for the rest of the year, Mr. Boehner cited deficit reduction, tax law changes and an effort to overhaul the country's entitlement systems. He didn't mention the continuing push to tackle immigration.

The speaker repeatedly declined to say to say whether he would support a bill that provided a route to citizenship for the 11 million or so immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally, the primary sticking point between House Republicans and the Senate bill, which passed last month.

"It is not about me," Mr. Boehner said. "This is about allowing the House to work its will." He declined to predict what sort of immigration legislation would eventually reach the House floor, and said his only intention was "to facilitate a process."

"If I come out and say, 'I'm for this and I'm for that,' all I'm doing is making my job harder," he said.

Asked if his party faced serious electoral peril in coming years if the GOP stands in the way of an immigration overhaul, Mr. Boehner shot back: "This isn't about politics and it isn't about our party. It is about doing the right thing for our country."

"Face the Nation" host Bob Schieffer noted that the speaker has presided over one of the least productive House sessions in history in terms of bills passed, but Mr. Boehner defended that record as central to his aim to cut the size of government.

"We should not be judged by how many new laws we create," he said. "We ought to be judged by how many laws we repeal."

The House has voted nearly 40 times to repeal Obamacare, and Mr. Boehner promised a continued effort on that front. "You are going to see bipartisan votes coming out the House to dismantle" Obamacare, he said.