

## An Advocate Rallies to Unify GOP

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Immigration policy is one of the few issues that split conservatives and the business lobby. It's the "shut the borders" pack vs. the "we need workers" crowd.

Conservative activist Tamar Jacoby has dedicated herself to bringing the two together. The outcome could determine whether key conservative members of Congress stand back and allow an overhaul of immigration law this year.

Jacoby has been busy. She has helped to light a fire under previously disengaged business owners in places such as [Texas](#), [Arizona](#) and [Colorado](#), where immigrants -- legal and illegal -- are a large part of the workforce. She has flown to those states to hold policy briefings and to encourage employers to tell their tales to conservative lawmakers in Washington. She talks daily to small-business owners.

Last week after a deal was reached in the Senate, Jacoby held a conference call with 20 business owners Friday to explain the politics of the overhaul and what may happen next. Debate on the bill is expected to begin tonight and run through Thursday.

"She is a tireless advocate behind the scenes for trying to come up with creative ideas to bring the various sides together," said Randel Johnson, a vice president at the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#). "The best part is she has the time to think about the ideas and meet with parties on the bill. We are all spread among many issues, but that's her baby."

Jacoby sat at a table in the Senate Chef last week surrounded by two Texas bankers, a cattle rancher and a guy who represents Rio Grande Valley orange growers, all of whom had flown in to put a last-minute press on their congressional representatives. She spent an hour rallying them.

"The most important thing is the temporary-worker program," Jacoby told them. Lawmakers "are going to go all out to cut it in half and unless business goes all out, like D-Day, they will surely win."

Ray Prewett, who lives in Mission, Tex., and runs a trade group for citrus farmers, leaned in.

Without enough immigrant workers "all the farms will move to [Mexico](#)," said Prewett, who was preparing to meet with [Sen. John Cornyn](#) (R). The senator has said that he has serious concerns about the immigration deal, and last year he voted against comprehensive restructuring. "We

need to go into these offices and say we need this now. . . . We know they won't vote for it, but we have to tell them not to stand in the way," Prewett said.

That is the kind of argument that could ultimately win the votes to revise the immigration law, lobbyists pushing to pass a bill say. Jacoby frames her desire to see lawmakers legalize the nation's 12 million illegal immigrants and lift the cap on temporary-worker visas as a means to allow "honest American business owners" using illegal-immigrant laborers to get on the right side of the law.

She is willing to work with religious and civil rights groups, including the [Roman Catholic Church](#) and the National Council of La Raza, a Hispanic advocacy group, to achieve the goal.

As the Texas business owners went off to meet with Cornyn and Republican congressmen [Jeb Hensarling](#) and [John Culberson](#), the leader of a Latino civil rights group tapped Jacoby on the shoulder. Brent A. Wilkes, national executive director of the League of United Latin American Citizens, told her that he was in the Senate to drop off 1,000 petitions supporting legalization for the 12 million illegal immigrants.

Jacoby has also tried to rally conservatives with arguments that immigrants are good for the economy and therefore good for the country. In the past two years she has met with dozens of lawmakers and their staff members, published 20 opinion articles on the topic in major newspapers and used the clout of the conservative Manhattan Institute, where she is a senior fellow, to spread her stance on immigration.

"A healthy economy, legality, assimilation -- those are all things that conservatives believe in," she said. "I'm not ceding those values to anyone."