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Jim DeMint's Sugar-Free Taste of Immigration Bill: 'Like Obamacare'

By: Mark Silva – May 5, 2013

Jim DeMint this week will put a price tag on the Senate's immigration bill.

Bloomberg's Heidi Przybyla reported he would last week.

In 2007, the last time Congress attempted to overhaul a system permitting millions to live undocumented in the U.S., the Heritage Foundation predicted costs in the trillions — costs borne by the nation's public assistance and safety-net programs. Under its new president, the former Republican senator from South Carolina, Heritage will reprise that line of attack.

"The study you'll see from Heritage this week presents a staggering cost of another amnesty in our country," DeMint said this morning on ABC News' "This Week," based on the "detrimental effects long-term" of government benefits that would eventually go to the millions offered a path to citizenship under the reform legislation currently being considered. "There's no reason we can't begin to fix our immigration system so that we won't make this problem worse. But the bill that's being presented is unfair to those who came here legally. It will cost Americans trillions of dollars. It'll make our unlawful immigration system worse."

Douglas Holtz-Eakin, the Cato Institute and others already have weighed in with a countervailing argument: The benefit to the economy of millions of people finding a potential path to citizenship and with that the tax revenue generated by legal employment.

DeMint today is reiterating what Heritage's Mike Gonzalez said last week as Bloomberg's Washington bureau reported on all this: He fully supports legal immigration — but not the "amnesty" that comes with offering 11 million undocumented people a path to citizenship. In the 800-page bill that a bipartisan group of senators has advanced — and which the Senate Judiciary Committee will start examining on Thursday — DeMint warns of another behemoth that nobody is really reading. Like "Obamacare."

Heritage will have to contend with another senator from South Carolina, Lindsey Graham, who is taking the Holtz-Eakin path to passage of the immigration bill with fellow senators of both parties. And still other Republicans will find their party riven along a line which some of them say is essential to the party's future, re-engaging with Hispanic voters who helped re-elect President Barack Obama. That line runs between Florida's Marco Rubio, one of the co-sponsors of the bill, and Texas's Ted Cruz, a freshly minted DeMint kind of senator.

That line will be drawn bright this week, as Heritage, and the bill, take the stage.

