



Conservative Infighting Erupts Over Immigration Reform

Influential conservative leader Jim DeMint bluntly warns, "I'm not going to be an apologist for the Republican Party."

By: John Stanton – April 9, 2013

Heritage Foundation President Jim DeMint Tuesday brushed aside conservative criticism of his organization's work on immigration reform, dismissing it as nothing more than inside-the-beltway sniping.

"Sounds like Washington to me" DeMint said of complaints by the CATO Institute and Americans for Tax Reform that Heritage is unfairly inflating the costs of looming immigration legislation in order to rally opposition.

The split highlights a growing division within the broader conservative movement over immigration, with organization's like Grover Norquist's ATR pushing for comprehensive reform while DeMint and others insist it is nothing more than a backdoor into amnesty. DeMint, who during his time in the Senate made a name for himself by issuing blunt conservative critiques of his own party, flatly warned that as head of Heritage he won't hold water for Republicans on immigration or any other issue.

"I'm not going to be an apologist for the Republican Party," he told a group of bloggers over Chick-fil-A sandwiches and sodas.

"It's really disturbing to me ... how many pieces of legislation over the last few years have been developed behind closed doors," DeMint said, arguing that the bill is being drafted by "staff people, big labor and big business. The members who are involved in this haven't seen it."

"Certainly the people in the room ... they see an economic benefit. But we need to help separate that for the American taxpayers ... Heritage will be the only organization in the country that is looking at the cost of the kind of blanket amnesty they're talking about," he added.

DeMint, who late last year left the Senate to join the conservative think tank, also warned that conservatives should be skeptical of promises to secure the border and better control legal immigration, pointing to a Reagan-era amnesty bill that ultimately did little to stem the flow of undocumented workers.

"All the promises won't be kept. And that's what helped us defeat this bill the last time ... you need to read some of the speeches [from the 80s]. They're even better than the ones being made today in terms of the promises that are being made, he said, adding that, "I don't like the process. It's holding hostage fixing the system in return for amnesty."

