

ROLL CALL

Congress Can Act on Immigration Before Year's End | Commentary

By Javier Ortiz

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The clock is slowly ticking down. As the year is coming to a close, so is the prospect of passing meaningful immigration reform.

Despite the fact that the Senate passed a comprehensive immigration reform bill this summer, the House of Representatives has yet to bring an alternative to a floor vote. House leaders say immigration reform is too important for the members of the chamber to move a comprehensive bill through Congress all at once.

Fair enough, particularly since we are watching the hugely botched results of Obamacare, a major piece of legislation that was forced through Congress before nearly anyone had an opportunity to read the bill. While no one faults House legislators for being deliberative and judicious — as we must avoid at all costs another “we have to pass the bill so you can find out what is in it” moment — movement on immigration reform should not come to a halt nor should we allow this window of opportunity for much needed reform to pass.

President Barack Obama and Senate leaders have even come on board to support a piecemeal approach, allowing each issue to be tackled in individual bills. This approach will allow for rigorous debate and, hopefully, the most effective solutions. In a recent speech, Obama attempted to pressure Congress to act and make immigration reform a top priority.

Strategically picking San Francisco for his speech, the president highlighted the fact that immigrants make up 35 percent of business owners in the California city. On a broader scale, a May 2012 report by the U.S. Small Business Administration found that roughly one out of 10 immigrant workers own a business, with an average sales level of \$435,000 per year.

Small-business owners are just one example of the many people who would benefit from passing comprehensive immigration reform. This reform has the ability to jump start our economy and ensures there are more dollars rolling into the Treasury. In addition, a recent CATO Institute study estimated that U.S. gross domestic product would increase by at least .84 percent each year after immigration reform was implemented.

Our government has been sidestepping too many tough issues as of late. Day after day, we read news reports about how little this Congress has been able to accomplish and how important issues are not addressed meaningfully. Currently, more than 11 million undocumented people are

in our country, living in de facto amnesty because politicians have been avoiding the giant elephant in the room. To put it in perspective, it has been nearly 30 years since we addressed immigration.

As a result, I believe Republicans in the House need to demonstrate they are serious about tackling this issue instead of employing rhetoric and making excuses to continue kicking the can down the road. House committees must conclude work on individual immigration bills and leadership must allow them to come to a floor vote. A lot of these issues such as border security will receive bipartisan support making avoidance all the more unacceptable.

Thirty years is too long. Immigration reform is extremely important to our national and economic security. And the American people deserve no less. Another year should not pass without beginning to address this crucial issue. It is time for Congress to act.