



Immigration Reform's Prospects In 2014

By [Jude Joffe-Block](#)

December 16, 2013

Nationally known immigration experts and advocates came to Tempe, Ariz. over the weekend to participate in [a formal debate](#). They also weighed in on the prospects of Congress passing immigration reform in 2014.

“I would be a crazy person to bet my house that it was gonna happen – I’m not foolish,” said Tamar Jacoby, the CEO of Immigration Works USA, a federation of business groups that favor reform. “But I also would not bet my house that it won’t happen.”

Some House members are working on piecemeal bills, rather than a comprehensive one like the Senate passed earlier this year.

Jacoby says House Republicans may be more willing to vote for immigration legislation after they find out if they are being challenged from the right in a primary. Filing deadlines in most states are by late spring.

“If you don’t have a challenger, you might feel freer to vote for this,” Jacoby said. “So after the filing deadlines is a possibility, after the primaries is a possibility, lame duck is a possibility. It’s going to be tricky, I mean let’s be honest, the windows are small and they are going to be tricky to navigate.”

But she said there are also some reasons to be hopeful.

“There is this will, there is a change of attitude in the Republican party,” Jacoby said. “I think there is a chance we really could get to this.”

Derrick Morgan of Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, said it was unrealistic to expect House Republicans to vote for any proposal that would legalize unauthorized immigrants in an election year.

“A lot of people feel like in 1986 there was a legalization of about three million undocumented, unlawful immigrants at that time, and now we have about 11 million,” Morgan said. “To do that all over again I think is too tall of an order for this Congress to do.”

Morgan predicts House members may tackle less controversial pieces of immigration legislation this year, such as reforms to the high tech visa programs and a proposal to track the exits of temporary visa holders.

Alex Nowrasteh of the libertarian Cato Institute said the argument that Congress can't take on immigration in an election year ignores history.

"The last three big immigration reforms that have happened have happened during election years, 1986, 1990 and 1996," Nowrasteh said.

But he warned that any unexpected crises in the new year could distract Congress from taking on immigration.

"It is hard to read these political tea leaves and figure out what kind of new problems are going to emerge in the political process."

Brent Wilkes of the League of United Latin American Citizens said there are recent signs that House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) may be willing to work on immigration next year.

Earlier this month, Boehner [hired Sen. John McCain's \(R-Ariz.\) former staffer Rebecca Tallent as an immigration adviser.](#)

"You've got, I think, some renewed strength on his part," Wilkes said. "He is certainly challenging the more conservative elements of his caucus, more so than he was willing to do before the shutdown."

Still, a major point of contention continues to be whether the millions of immigrants in the country illegally should get a pathway to citizenship. The Senate bill includes such a path and it has been key to immigrant advocates' platform, but many House Republicans have said they won't support it.

Jacoby says there seems to be a growing number of House Republicans who favor giving these immigrants legal status that would allow them to work and travel, but no special path to citizenship.

"In my view the \$11 million question is do Democrats take that half a loaf for an answer, or do they say, no it has to be the whole thing," Jacoby said.

The debate was held at Rio Salado College. KJZZ Phoenix is licensed to Rio Salado College, part of the Maricopa County Community College District.