

Tampa Bay Times

Rubio meets with conservatives who want immigration bill to move to the right

By: Alex Leary – May 7, 2013

Sen. Marco Rubio this afternoon met with more than two dozen conservatives, from religious leaders to tea party activists, who offered an array of suggestions on how to make the immigration bill more palatable to Republicans.

"Everybody has concerns about the bill," said Alex Nowrasteh, a policy analyst with the Cato Institute, who was one of the first to emerge from the hour-long gathering at Rubio's office.

But he said the group was largely in favor of reform and ready to back Rubio, who signaled he wants to take steps to gain more GOP support. "I think it will move significantly to the right," Nowrasteh said of the bill, which will get a critical Judiciary Committee hearing on Thursday. Amendments were piling up Tuesday.

Nowrasteh said he expressed concern with the E-Verify provisions, which Cato does not like, but also suggested adding more lower-skilled guest worker slots. Jeffrey Bell, policy director of the American Principles Project, echoed the call for more guest workers.

On enforcement, Bell said "triggers" in the bill that are required as 11 million people move toward legal status need to be tightened up. Rubio seemed to agree. "He's confident he can get the changes, that the bill has to change somewhat," Bell said.

Grover Norquist, head of Americans for Tax Reform, agreed the enforcement benchmarks are an overriding concern, designing them so the public sees there is a true effort on security, not just promises.

"Everybody was trying to be helpful. There weren't any voices in the room saying 'I'm against everything,'" Norquist said.

As the group let out, Rubio was on a conference call with another group arranged by the Hispanic Leadership Network.

His message: This bill is only a starting point.

Among those attending:

Al Cardenas, ACU

Sal Russo, Tea Party.Net

Diana Furchtgott-Roth, Manhattan Institute

Ken Weinstein, Hudson Institute

Alex Nowrasteh, CATO Institute

Barrett Duke, Southern Baptist Convention

Morton Blackwell, The Leadership Institute

Niger Innis, Tea Party.Net

Todd Cefaratti, Tea Party.Net

Grover Norquist, ATR

James Pethokoukis, American Enterprise Institute

Elliott Abrams, Council on Foreign Relations

Paul Wolfowitz, American Enterprise Institute

Steven Law, American Crossroads

Douglas Holtz-Eakin, American Action Network

Norm Coleman, American Action Network

John Shadegg, who is a Visiting Distinguished Fellow at the Heritage Foundation.