



House Resolution to Test Support for Immigration Reform

By: Julián Aguilar - February 13, 2013

A spokesman for Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples said on Wednesday his office was also working with legislators on drafting a resolution “that has broad support among legislators, border sheriffs and the business community.”

“Among the principles Commissioner Staples is advocating are reforming our workforce immigration system, maintaining our current pathways for citizenship, securing our borders and ending the shadow economy by providing legal work status for the millions currently living here illegally,” Bryan Black, the communications director for the office, said in a statement.

Staples was to hold a press conference with state Sen. Craig Estes, R-Wichita Falls, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs and Homeland Security, on Wednesday morning. That press conference was canceled.

Anchia said he was approached by state Rep. Byron Cook, R-Corsicana, who was also working with Staples on the resolution but that there “was no nefarious intent” to undermine the Republicans’ efforts or file his resolution sooner.

“I was clear with Byron [Cook] that Ana [Hernandez] and I were filing something today,” he said. “I think it was more a coincidence.” Anchia said he did not read a draft and would reserve judgment on it until he could take a closer look, but he was willing to work with Republicans to gain their support for his measure.

In a statement Wednesday, Staples lauded the efforts of Anchia and Hernandez Luna, though he disagreed with creating a pass to citizenship for those already in the country illegally.

“I applaud the members for working on solutions and for incorporating some of the work Texas Republicans are doing to repair the workforce immigration system,” Staples said. “In order for responsible immigration reform to be successful, we must reject political gamesmanship that seeks to invent alternative pathways to citizenship and instead focus on ending a shadow economy that is unjust to both those who are undocumented and to all Americans.” Staples added: “It is time for the federal government to do its part to secure our border and fix the broken immigration system that threatens American sovereignty and economic prosperity.”

We have a call in to Cook’s office and will update this post when we hear back.

Original story:

Democratic Texas House members on Wednesday filed an immigration resolution that could serve as a litmus test for Republican support for reforms being suggested at the national level.

House Concurrent Resolution 44, which urges the U.S. Congress to "swiftly enact and fund comprehensive immigration reform that creates a road map to citizenship," comes after President Obama's Tuesday State of the Union address, where he again pushed Congress to craft a bill to address the 11 million to 12 million people living in the country illegally, and to repair the nation's existing immigration system. Filed by state Reps. Rafael Anchia, D-Dallas, and Ana Hernandez Luna, D-Houston, it incorporates statistics from the Texas comptroller, the Cato Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy, and statements of support for immigration reform from former state Reps. John Garza, R-San Antonio, and Raul Torres, R-Corpus Christi, and the Texas Federation of Republican Women, as well as a national reform framework authored by a bipartisan group of U.S. senators.

Anchia said he wanted the resolution to have some substance and make a strong statement: that Texas can lead the way on immigration reform.

"According to a poll of 1,000 voters conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, a Republican polling firm, and Hart Research Associates, a Democratic firm, a solid 77 percent of voters favor a full package of immigration reform," Anchia said in a statement.

Hernandez Luna said it was time for others to benefit from the opportunity to come out of the shadows, an experience she knows firsthand. During the debate over the controversial sanctuary cities proposal two years ago, Hernandez Luna gave a tearful speech about how she was an undocumented immigrant until immigration reform was passed under President Ronald Reagan's administration.

"As an immigrant I can relate to all of these families," she said on Wednesday. "I was undocumented for eight years." She went on to graduate high school at 16 and attend law school after college. She was first elected to the Texas House when she was 27.

"None of that would have been possible without immigration reform in 1986," she added.

Anchia said he would reach out to the House Republican Caucus and open up the resolution to joint authorship. He said the timing was ideal after seeing that lawmakers in Texas were unwilling to pass "divisive" state-based immigration measures similar to bills passed in Arizona and Alabama.

"Texas has resisted that, and I am proud of the state for having done that," he said. "If we do not keep momentum going and it fails, I worry we won't be able to get anything accomplished for a long, long time."

The resolution states that, according to a 2006 study conducted by the comptroller, the deportation of the millions of Texans in the state illegally would have resulted in a loss to the state's gross domestic product of \$18 billion. Figures from the Cato Institute indicate an overhaul of the country's immigration system would add an additional \$1.5 trillion to the country's GDP.

The resolution echoes what both parties have said needs to occur before a major overhaul of the old system can occur — fully securing the border. That language has irked some border leaders who say the border is already secure, and allege that elected officials who live far away from the area should not be dictating border security policy. El Paso County Judge Veronica Escobar said this week that the rhetoric hurts legal trade and migration, and paints the border in a bad light.

“I agree with the judge that the border is secure,” Anchia said. “I hear from all opinion leaders that say progress has been made. That language is in there because that continues to be an issue to our friends across the aisle.”