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The right's last stand against immigration reform?

By: Greg Sargent – May 6, 2013

The Heritage Foundation has just released its long awaited report supposedly documenting that the path to citizenship in the Gang of Eight immigration reform compromise will sock the taxpayer with a multi-trillion-dollar bill. You cannot overstate how much opponents of reform have staked on the hope that this report will be the magic bullet to kill the proposal. This is the report that's supposed to send House conservatives running away, never to return.

My Post colleague Jennifer Rubin has a long post detailing the substantive pre-butts of the Heritage study that are coming from other Republicans and conservatives who favor reform and argue Heritage's methodology is flawed:

The Cato Institute has already come up with a detailed pre-rebuttal of Heritage's work. And, ironically, even the Congressional Budget Office can figure out that with dynamic scoring of the type pioneered by Heritage (when it was an intellectual trailblazer for conservatives), the country and the Treasury come out ahead.

In a sense, though, the substance here is beside the point. What's remarkable about this whole spectacle is that no one is even bothering to pretend that the Heritage study *isn't* simply a last ditch effort to kill the bill. That's widely, publicly, explicitly acknowledged to be the case. Indeed, a Heritage study back during the last immigration reform battle is widely credited with giving the right the ammo they needed to scuttle that proposal, and opponents are openly discussing today's study as providing the chance of a rerun of that glorious moment.

In this case, though, the response from Republicans to the study has been swift and aggressive. Reporters were sent a whole list of Republican Congressional aides and conservative think tank types who are prepared to push back on the study — a measure of just how much the GOP establishment wants reform to pass this time.

Ultimately, the prospects for immigration reform have always turned on whether enough Republicans are willing to swallow hard, cross the citizenship Rubicon, and accept the consequences for the right. This report doesn't change that basic dynamic. It will give an army of talk show hosts and bloggers opposed to reform plenty of ammunition to kick up a whole lot of noise against the proposal, to be sure.

But it's just as true today as it was last week that reform is only going to happen if enough Republicans ignore all that noise and decide that short term pain from the base is well worth dealing with in order to give the party a chance to at least begin repairing relations with Latinos, at a time when demographic realities are looking extremely daunting over the long term. And make no mistake — it's only the far right who opposes

a path to citizenship; polls show solid majorities overall, and even substantial numbers of Republicans.

If far right Republicans in the House kill reform, that would be the worst possible political outcome for the GOP. The noise from the far right may have just gotten a bit louder, but the consequences for Republicans of allowing the noise to kill reform haven't changed at a