

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

## **GOP Leaders Aim to Build Support for Immigration Bill**

Siobhan Hughes

June 26, 2018

Republican leaders worked to build support among rank-and-file GOP lawmakers for a broad immigration bill tentatively set for a vote on Wednesday, aiming to minimize defections after President Donald Trump vacillated on whether he backed the measure.

House Republicans were meeting Tuesday morning behind closed doors, where GOP leaders will gauge support after floating revisions to make it harder to work in the U.S. without legal documentation and to establish a new agricultural guest-worker program. The proposed changes are intended to help win more votes, and GOP leaders need to meet with Republican members before they know whether they have succeeded.

Mr. Trump has complicated the GOP effort by shifting his position on the measure, a compromise hammered out between centrist and conservative Republicans. Underscoring the degree to which Mr. Trump has created impediments for the bill, House Majority Whip Steve Scalise (R., La.) on Monday night told a closed-door meeting that some Republicans have said they couldn't vote for the broad immigration measure without more full-throated support from the president, according to a person familiar with the matter.

Rep. Patrick McHenry (R., N.C.) told reporters Monday night that the president would provide "ideally a full-throated endorsement" of the compromise. He also acknowledged Mr. Trump's recent calls for GOP lawmakers to "stop wasting their time on immigration" until after the election, which the president expects to favor both Republicans and his hard-line approach, marked by a recent crackdown on migrants from Central America.

"The president's expectation is this is not the time that we can actually get immigration across the floor and to his desk because we don't have any participation from Democrats," Mr. McHenry said.

House Democrats were also meeting behind closed doors. Democrats have shown little sign of supporting the new immigration measure, unifying last week against a more conservative alternative that fell on a 193-231 vote. Among other things, Democrats oppose provisions that would cut legal immigration and that would establish what Democrats see as a hard-to-enter

pathway to citizenship for young immigrants brought to the country as children. A Cato Institute report issued earlier this month estimated that only 18% of the population of young immigrants known as Dreamers would make it onto the pathway for citizenship, with only 12% likely to apply for and receive citizenship.

With Democrats opposed, House Republicans must cobble together a majority of the House from within their own divided conference for an immigration overhaul. That task has proved nearly impossible for years. Conservatives tend to oppose special treatment for those who came to the country without legal authorization, worrying that the immigrants risk turning the U.S. into a magnet for low-skilled workers who drive down American wages. Centrist Republicans take a more moderate approach.

Similar dynamics are at play in the GOP-led Senate, which earlier this year failed to pass a broad immigration bill. Senate Republicans are now focused on legislation that would deal narrowly with the controversy sparked by Mr. Trump's decision, since reversed, to separate children from their migrant families while prosecuting adults for trying to enter the country. But that effort, which centers on passing legislation to allow the Trump administration to detain families together, is also stumbling amid opposition from Democrats, who prefer to release immigrants into communities while they pursue asylum claims.

"I don't know how you bridge that view," said Sen. Bob Menendez (D., N.J.).

If the compromise immigration bill is defeated this week as expected, it could potentially undercut centrist Republicans, especially if it draws less support than the conservative alternative. A significant number of Republican defections would signal the party broadly prefers a tough approach over more moderate tactics, a problem for Republicans up for re-election in districts with large Hispanic populations that Hillary Clinton won in 2016.

"We don't have a deal until we have 218 votes," said House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R., Va.), citing the number of votes needed to clear legislation when the House is at its full complement of 435 members.

On Monday night, Mr. Trump stuck with his strategy of emphasizing that he was tough on border security and drawing a contrast with Democrats. "They want to protect illegals coming into this country much more so than they want to protect you," Mr. Trump said at a campaign rally in West Columbia, S.C. "And that's not where we're coming from."

The House bill translates many of the priorities the White House laid out earlier this year into a legislative blueprint, providing \$23.4 billion for border security, including a wall and surveillance technology, over nine years. It would eliminate a diversity lottery that provides visas to people from underrepresented countries. It would make it harder to pursue asylum claims by requiring asylum seekers to prove their claims that they fear persecution at home are more probable than not to be true. That is a higher hurdle than under existing law.

On Tuesday morning, the focal point is expected to be on two potential additions to the compromise bill. One would mandate that employers nationwide use E-Verify, an online system that allows employers to check the immigration status of its employees and which has long been a popular measure among conservatives. Another would create an expanded guest-worker agriculture program to make it easier to bring migrant workers into the U.S. legally.

“Everybody is seeing how many more votes that would actually add,” said Rep. Mark Meadows (R., N.C.), the House Freedom Caucus chairman who has been a key player in immigration negotiations. He said that “it definitely adds votes.”