



MEDIA AVAILABILITY
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Immigration reform must be bipartisan

(Washington, April 23) – Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi agreed this week to move comprehensive immigration reform through Congress before the end of the year.

ImmigrationWorks president Tamar Jacoby commented in an op-ed piece that appears in today's Washington Post.

"Lots of people cheered this week when it was reported that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had agreed to steer comprehensive immigration reform through Congress by year's end ... This could be a game-changer for reform. But that's only if it leads to a genuine, bipartisan push for an overhaul. A symbolic, partisan effort — such as introducing a bill that cannot pass — would be worse than no action at all and could set the cause back for years."

The full text of the article is attached.

**IW USA president Tamar Jacoby can be reached for comment at
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ImmigrationWorks USA is a national business federation advocating immigration policy that works for employers, workers and citizens. The organization links 25 state-based coalitions of employers and trade groups from every sector that relies on immigrant workers. IW assists these groups with strategic coordination, messaging and grassroots recruitment as they fight for better immigration law in their states and Washington. IW's goal: to mobilize a national business constituency in favor of immigration reform. The organization works closely with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Restaurant Association, the National Association of Home Builders, the U.S. Travel Association, American Farm Bureau and other leading trade groups. Its board of directors includes former U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez, former AZ Rep. Jim Kolbe and Bill Marriott, chairman and CEO of Marriott International, among others.

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The Washington Post

IMMIGRATION REFORM'S BIG MOMENT

By Tamar Jacoby

April 23, 2010

Lots of people cheered this week when it was reported that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi had agreed to steer comprehensive immigration reform through Congress by year's end. This is a bold, exciting plan -- and if it works, it could be a game-changer.

But that's only if it leads to a genuine, bipartisan push for an overhaul. A symbolic, partisan effort -- such as introducing a bill that cannot pass -- would be worse than no action at all and could set the cause back for years.

Congress has tried and failed to pass immigration reform twice in the past four years. A failure this summer would make it much harder for lawmakers to try again soon. Reformers have only one more shot before 2012 -- an opportunity they must not waste.

President Obama is trying to jump-start the debate, calling several Republican senators this week to gauge their interest in immigration. But the odds of getting a bill through Congress this year are steep.

Even with Democratic majorities in both houses, it's going to take both Democrats and Republicans to pass reform: Many moderate Democrats are just as likely as Republicans to vote no. Voters across the country are angry at incumbents. Unemployment is still hovering near 10 percent. And after the ordeal of health care, few lawmakers in either party are in the mood to take another controversial vote.

Neither Reid nor Pelosi has commented on the odds of success. But since Reid declared he would move a bill (he made the surprise announcement earlier this month at a largely Latino rally in Nevada, where Latinos make up 15 percent of the vote), many Democrats have jumped in to speak for him.

These supporters fall into two camps. Some, including leaders of the movement for immigrant rights, argue that forcing consideration of a bill this year would create momentum and draw Republicans into the debate -- and that some GOP lawmakers, fearful of alienating Latino voters, will ultimately support reform. As this group sees it, Reid is playing hardball with Republicans, but his ultimate goal is passing a bipartisan bill.

A second group of Democrats has offered a strikingly different, more cynical calculus.

Listen to Markos Moulitsas of the Daily Kos: "Reid should push for a vote whether he has the 60 [votes] or not. While the ultimate goal is reform, even a losing vote would show Latinos where the opposition is coming from and help motivate them for the November elections."

An unnamed Democratic Senate aide spoke even more bluntly to Roll Call last week: "An all-Democratic bill works better . . . because the tea party and right-wing will react strongly and permanently alienate Latinos."

In other words, some Democrats don't particularly care if no Republicans vote for reform -- if anything, they welcome the opportunity to show up the GOP.

But that would do nothing to fix the country's broken immigration system. It would not bring a single undocumented immigrant out of the shadows. It would not create a workable, legal immigration system to serve U.S. interests during the economic recovery and beyond. The way some activists see things, Democrats don't need to deliver reform to please Latinos, the fastest-growing voting bloc in the country. They just need to make Republicans look bad.

There is nothing new about this kind of political thinking. Most lawmakers fall into one of two categories: those who want to solve problems and those whose main concern is scoring political points. When the second group wins, pressing problems become perennial wedge issues -- issues we then give up on solving because they're so potent on Election Day.

If it is difficult to move on immigration reform now, isn't the climate likely to be worse in 2011? Many reformers think so. No one who believes we need to fix immigration wants to wait. And Republicans will surely gain seats in November.

But contrary to conventional wisdom, Republican gains could actually create incentives for bipartisanship on both sides of the aisle -- on immigration and other issues. By early 2011, the economy would be growing and unemployment ebbing. Obama would be under intense pressure to deliver for Latino voters. And many Republicans, too, would want to fix the system and get immigration behind them before a tumultuous presidential election year.

The mood in Washington is volatile, and Congress may well take up immigration this year. But a partisan push that failed, or poisoned the well for the future, would ultimately be far worse than no push at all.

The writer is president of ImmigrationWorks USA, a national federation of employers advocating immigration reform.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/22/AR2010042204209.html>