

# Calls For Action At Senate Immigration Hearing

BY ERICA WERNER  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers who are shaping the fate of the millions of people in the U.S. illegally were told by one Wednesday that it's time to rewrite immigration laws so that they, too, can live the American dream.

"What do you want to do with me?" an emotional Jose Antonio Vargas demanded of senators. "How do you define American?"

The first Senate hearing on immigration policy this year pointed toward an emerging bipartisan consensus that the nation's 11 million illegal immigrants should be offered a path to citizenship. But passionate divisions over the issue also surfaced as one Republican decried amnesty and shouting protesters interrupted the proceedings.

"You really mean that we're not going to have enforcement, but we've got to have amnesty first," Sen. Jeff Sessions, a top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, confronted the panel's chairman, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

Leahy and Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano rejected the argument that border security must be the focus before a comprehensive immigration package or any pathway to legalization can be done.

An immigration overhaul is a priority for President Barack Obama and lawmakers after a brutal election in which voters again elected a divided government. Democrats control the White House and the Senate, while Republicans hold the House majority.

But for all of the division and polarization in Washington, the hearing produced evidence of bipartisan agreement to fix what all agree is a broken system — and finally dispense with a wrenching issue that has bedeviled lawmakers for years.

Vargas' testimony produced a striking moment in which one of the 11 million illegal immigrants at the center of the debate confronted the elected officials

reconsidering the law.

A former journalist who acknowledged his illegal status in a high-profile piece in The New York Times Magazine in June 2011, Vargas recalled his journey to the U.S. from the Philippines in 1993. He told lawmakers that he never knew he was here illegally until he applied for a drivers' permit, and that he lived for years in fear until he decided to go public and start an advocacy group. He has so far avoided deportation.

"Too often, we're treated as abstractions, faceless and nameless, mere subjects of debate rather than individuals with families, hopes, fears, and dreams," Vargas told committee members. "We dream of a path to citizenship so we can actively participate in our American democracy." Democrats on the panel offered praise and encouragement. Republicans had little response.

For Vargas and others in his position the deliberations offered some encouraging signs mixed with unmistakable notes of caution.

Protesters interrupted the hearing several times, with some shouting and waving banners against deportations, which have increased markedly under the Obama administration despite its push to find a political accommodation for many who have been living in the U.S. Later people in another group stood and silently turned their backs to the dais where the senators sat. They wore signs on their backs reading "human rights" and "immigrant rights." Leahy chided them for interrupting proceedings.

Obama says he is determined to finally make good on his promise to the Latino community to sign into law a comprehensive immigration bill with border security, employer enforcement, improvements to legal immigration and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants already here. Meanwhile, a bipartisan group of eight senators has been meeting to develop a bill by next month that accomplishes eventual citizenship for illegal

immigrants while also containing enough border security and enforcement measures to gain conservative support.

The four Democrats in the Senate negotiating group met with Obama at the White House on Wednesday, telling him they were confident a bipartisan bill could be agreed to "in the coming weeks," a senior Democrat said later, speaking on condition of anonymity because the meeting was private. A White House statement said Obama reiterated his intention to offer legislation of his own if Congress fails to act, and told senators that continuing to strengthen the border should not be mutually exclusive from a pathway to citizenship.

The Senate bipartisan plan makes a pathway to citizenship conditional on border security first, something on which Republicans have insisted. Obama's immigration proposals don't make that linkage, and it's emerging as a point of contention.

The bipartisan Senate negotiators are operating separately from the Senate Judiciary Committee, but the committee would probably vote on any legislation they produce. First, numerous thorny issues would have to be solved. Questions Wednesday touched on how to define border security, how to structure a future worker program, how to ensure employers can and will verify the legal status of their workers, and how to craft a path to citizenship that would not advantage illegal immigrants over those attempting the process legally.

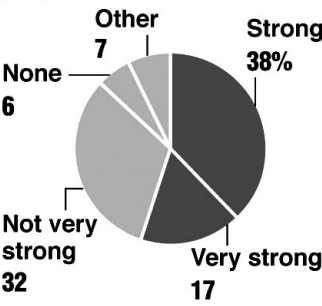
The action comes in a rapidly shifting political environment. Polls find more Americans support eventual citizenship for illegal immigrants and many Republican leaders are coming around to the same view after their party's dismal showing among Latino voters in the November elections.

But, as the hearing made clear, deep divisions exist within the GOP that could threaten any legislation in the Senate, where Republicans hold enough votes to stall

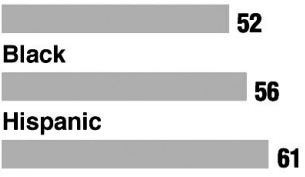
## Conflict with foreign born

A majority of U.S. adults say that strong conflicts exist between immigrants and native born.

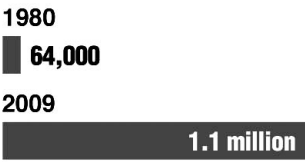
• How much conflict is there between immigrants and people born in the U.S. ?



By racial, ethnic group  
Percent saying there are "very strong," or "strong" conflicts



African black immigrants  
Blacks make up only 9 percent of all U.S. immigrants, but African blacks are one of the fastest-growing



Source: Pew Research Center poll of 1,506 adults, Nov. 28-Dec. 5, 2012; margin of error: +/-2.2 percentage points; Migratory Policy Institute Graphic: Judy Treible © 2013 MCT

legislation, or in the House, where majority Republicans are waiting to see what the Senate does before taking any action.

# Boehner: Up To Democrats To Prevent Budget Cuts

BY ANDREW TAYLOR & JULIE PACE  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker John Boehner said Wednesday it's unlikely the Republican-controlled House and Democratic-led Senate will prevent a wave of automatic spending cuts from beginning to strike the economy in two weeks. Yet he sounded hopeful about avoiding a partial shutdown of the government when a temporary spending bill expires next month.

Cloistered in his Capitol office overlooking the National Mall, Boehner said in an interview with The Associated Press that he was skeptical of many of President Barack Obama's plans, laid out the night before in the annual State of the Union address.

Boehner voiced doubts about Obama's proposal for taxpayer-funded help for pre-school education for all 4-year-olds, and would not commit to passing a pathway to citizenship for the nation's 11 million illegal immigrants, though doing so would be "somewhat helpful" to members of his party as they seek to regain support among Hispanics. "There's no magic potion that's going to solve our party's woes with Hispanics," he said.

Boehner also refused to swing behind any of Obama's gun-control proposals and said he opposed the president's plan to raise the minimum wage to \$9 an hour.

The Ohio Republican said he gets along well with Obama but admits their relationship hasn't generated much in the way of results, pointing to two failed rounds of budget talks in 2011 and at the end of last year. Boehner is

frustrated that spending cuts Obama signaled he would agree to in 2011 have been taken off the table since the election.

"It hasn't been real productive the last two years, and frankly every time I've gotten into one of these high-profile negotiations, it's my rear end that got burnt," Boehner said. "It's just probably not the best way for our government to operate."

Obama stumped Wednesday in support of his minimum-wage plan, his calls for a manufacturing revival and his other State of the Union proposals in a trip to Asheville, N.C., where he said: "If you work full time, you shouldn't be in poverty." He takes his case to Georgia on Thursday and his hometown of Chicago on Friday, all part of his effort to build popular support for an agenda facing stiff resistance back in Washington.

"It's not a Democratic thing or a Republican thing," Obama said of his initiatives. "Our job as Americans is to restore that basic bargain that says if you work hard, if you meet your responsibilities, you can get ahead."

The immediate agenda, though, is dominated by \$85

billion in automatic, across-the-board spending cuts — called a sequester in Washington-speak — set to slam the Pentagon and domestic programs over the coming seven months. Boehner said he has no plans to resurrect legislation passed by Republicans last year to block this year's sequester.

The speaker said that until Obama puts forward a plan to avoid the sequester and Senate Democrats pass it, "we're going to be stuck with it. It's going to be a little bleak around here when this actually happens and people actually have to make decisions."

Boehner noted that while plenty of GOP defense hawks are anxious about automatic cuts, Democrats concerned with cuts to domestic programs have a lot on the line, too.

And he sounded glum about prospects that the two sides will come together in the spring on a separate, long-term budget blueprint to address the government's fiscal problems.

"It's hard to imagine that you could reconcile (the separate budgets) the House and Senate pass," Boehner said. "But at some point, in some manner, it almost

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