

House votes to declare Obama's immigration actions 'null and void'

By Michael A. Memoli

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Speaker of the House John Boehner answers questions during his weekly news conference on Thursday in Washington. (Win McNamee / Getty Images)

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House votes, in largely symbolic move, to undercut Obama immigration actions
House passes bill that could pave the way for spending bill to avert shutdown

House Republicans approved a measure Thursday that aims to block the Obama administration from moving to shield millions from deportation, a largely symbolic legislative response to the president's new immigration policy that reflects lawmakers' limited options.

The House measure, approved on a 219-197 vote, is the first step in a two-part plan devised by GOP leadership to provide an outlet for Republican frustration over the White House plan while also preventing the issue from provoking another government funding crisis.

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House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) and incoming Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) are intent on avoiding a repeat of past fiscal brinkmanship as the GOP is set to assume full control of Congress.

The House bill, called Executive Amnesty Prevention Act, states that any attempt by the administration to exempt immigrants from deportation laws "shall be null and void and without legal effect."

Boehner said Thursday the proposal makes it clear that House Republicans "are rejecting [Obama's] unilateral actions," and urged the Senate to vote on it, too.

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"To do anything less would be an act of monumental arrogance," he said. "The American people elected us to heed their will and not to bow to the whims of a White House that regards the legislative process established by the Constitution as little more than a nuisance."

White House officials have defended the president's plan, saying his executive action is legal and necessary in light of congressional inaction on the nation's immigration problem.

Conservative lawmakers mostly supported the bill by Rep. Ted Yoho (R-Fla.) but complained it will do nothing to prevent the president's plan from moving forward since Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), who remains the majority leader until year's end, has vowed not to take up the bill, and the White House has threatened to veto it.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) this week mocked such "show votes" as ineffective.

He and other conservatives are pushing for next week's government spending bill to include specific language that would restrict the Department of Homeland Security from being able to implement the plan. Lawmakers are working against a Dec. 11 deadline to approve a new spending bill and avert a shutdown.

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"We will fund the operation of the federal government, but we will not allocate taxpayer dollars for lawless and illegal amnesty," Cruz said.

The conservative group Heritage Action also signaled it would rally opposition to Boehner's compromise plan to fund most of the federal government until next fall, but carve out the Homeland Security Department, which handles immigration agencies.

Under Boehner's plan, funding for Homeland Security would be extended only until early next year, giving Republicans another chance to pressure Obama on his immigration action.

In the past, such a move might have been difficult for Boehner to push through due to his often-rebellious tea-party wing. But Democrats have offered tentative support and could provide the votes needed to ensure passage.

"As we had to supply the votes last year to open up government, let us supply the votes to keep government open," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) said at a news conference. "But we can't do it unless we have a bill that is worthy of our support."

Boehner also is in a more secure political position as his majority is set to grow in January.

"We worked with an awful lot of our members, and frankly, I'm pretty comfortable with where we are," he said.

Democrats nonetheless decried the Yoho proposal while defending the legality of Obama's actions, which could spare more than 4 million immigrants from the threat of deportation.

"There is strong historical precedent for the president's actions," Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose) said during the floor debate. "Prior presidents were not met with such obstructionism."

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