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# Republicans meeting on strategy to counter Obama immigration moves



By **Robert Costa and Ed O'Keefe** December 2 at 6:00 AM

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House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio) addresses reporters outside his office in the U.S. Capitol on Nov. 21. (AP/J. Scott Applewhite)

*This item has been updated.*

Republican lawmakers are moving closer to using legislation to fund the federal government as a way to formally respond to President Obama's overhaul of the nation's immigration laws, meeting Tuesday to discuss exactly how to proceed.

The House GOP was still considering several possible funding bills as discussions continued, the leadership's favored Hill response to Obama's immigration moves, according to senior GOP aides familiar with the process -- a strategy that would demonstrate the party's defiance

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while avoiding the shutdown theatrics and public disapproval that plagued it last year.

The debate to come will need to strike a delicate balance. It will need to assure conservatives the immigration fight is not being abandoned. It will also need to avoid alienating the Hispanic and immigrant community that has welcomes the changes. How the process is handled and what bill is ultimately passed will have implications far beyond Capitol Hill for a party that made significant gains this year but is still rebuilding its brand.

One bill under review, pushed by tea party conservative Rep. Ted Yoho (R-Fla.), would attempt to ban the White House from changing immigration laws, and is seen as a largely symbolic effort to curb the president's executive authority. If passed, it would be quickly discarded by the Democratic-controlled Senate.

Another proposal, with more implications for government funding, is a long-term comprehensive spending bill with parts related to immigration funding adjusted so that they are only funded for a brief period. The intent would be to keep most of the government funded while keeping the debate on immigration active into the new year.

The situation, however, remains fluid and how the leadership manages to float and sell its possible plays will be under scrutiny on Tuesday when Republicans hear from House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio). Ahead of that meeting, Boehner was seen conferring during Monday night votes in the House Chamber with Rep. Hal Rogers (R-Ky.), who chairs the Appropriations Committee and has

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been pushing for as seamless a process as possible.

Several potential Republican presidential candidates, concerned about the political consequences of another showdown between the White House and Capitol Hill, are keeping close watch on the deliberations and urging caution.

At a private luncheon Monday on Capitol Hill, former Florida governor Jeb Bush told a group of GOP officials and donors, including soon-to-be Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and House Majority Whip Steve Scalise (R-La.), that the party should avoid a standoff.

Instead, Bush said in brief remarks, Republicans should pass a series of "sensible" immigration bills next year once they control both congressional chambers to underscore their commitment to governing and reforming the immigration system with their own policies.

Bush also argued that this post-election moment was an ideal setting for Republicans to better promote their ideas on energy, education, and the economy and said he hoped those issues would not be overshadowed.

"It was a mature pitch," said Bush ally Dan Meyer, a former legislative affairs official in the George W. Bush White House. "He was serious about the importance of leading responsibly."

Speaking earlier, McConnell said Republicans must pursue an aggressive agenda in the coming months without becoming mired by internal clashes over strategy. While highly critical of the president, he did not call for a drastic

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fiscal battle to be mounted during the lame-duck session as a response to the president's action.

"McConnell stood up and addressed the challenges that he and the Republicans have going forward. He told us about the need to manage expectations that come with winning power," said John Pohanka, an automobile dealer and GOP donor.

The meeting at the National Republican Senatorial Committee's headquarters was officially billed as a fundraiser for Rep. Bill Cassidy (R-La.), who is campaigning against Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.) in a runoff scheduled for Saturday. Donors were served a spread of cold sandwiches and chocolate-chip cookies.

Leaving the session, Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus called Bush's presentation "great" but declined to say more about the party's ongoing immigration talks.

Sen. Rob Portman (R-Ohio), who introduced Bush on Monday and [announced that he won't be running for president himself](#), said he remains optimistic that Republicans can pass long-term appropriations bills.

"No one in the leadership, or in meetings I'm in, is talking about shutting down the government," Portman said. Echoing Bush, he added, "The right way to approach immigration is to legislate."

But Heritage Action CEO Mike Needham warned that conservative activists -- and especially "our 10,000 sentinels" who follow Congress closely -- would rally to

defund immigration programs in the coming days, shrugging off the advice coming from the party's establishment.

"We will ask Republicans to propose a limiting amendment that would cut any fees or funds for the president's unlawful amnesty," Needham said. "If they put that onto an omnibus bill as a rider, it could be something we support. But we expect Republicans to use the power of the purse to make sure the president's actions are not enforced or funded."

Beyond the spending bill, several unresolved issues remain for Congress with less than two full weeks left on the calendar. House leaders have said that their target adjournment date is Friday Dec. 12. Outgoing Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) warned on Monday that he might keep his chamber open the week before Christmas in order to complete unfinished business.

The other complex item still unresolved is the annual bill that sets Pentagon policy. The legislation is expected to include new language authorizing continued military operations in Iraq and Syria, but negotiators are still tied up on other details, including the fate of terrorism detainees at the U.S. facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and proposed changes to military housing allowances and some medical benefits for troops and their families. The fate of a federally-backed insurance program to protect against major terrorist attacks is also in flux as House and Senate negotiators keep talking about making changes to a Senate-passed plan.

With the House mulling all three bills, the Senate plans to devote most of the week to confirming more Obama administration nominees.

Two of President Obama's picks to serve as ambassadors -- Noah Mamet to serve in Argentina and Colleen Bell to serve as top envoy to Hungary -- are expected to be confirmed on Tuesday. Up next are nominees to serve as deputy secretary of housing and urban development; to be a commissioner of the Consumer Product Safety Commission; and nominees to serve as a member and the top lawyer of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

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