What can we expect to happen on immigration?

by Pat Perriello

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The first test of cooperation between the new Congress and the White House is likely to be on the issue of immigration. There do not appear to be any positive vibes coming out of the discussion at this point.

We are told that President Barack Obama will issue an executive order soon which will change the policy of the United States on immigration. The Republican Congress is outraged and will refuse to pass a budget or consider any immigration measures if the President follows through with his plan. There is even talk of another government shutdown. The President points out that all Congress has to do is pass an immigration bill and any executive order will go away.

At one level the struggle is again about the base of each party. The President has been promising such action for many months and is being pressured by many in his party to follow through. Republicans who want to act on immigration are being prevented from doing so by party members who see any action as amnesty and any move by the President as unconstitutional.

It is important, however, to understand what is at stake here. The effort to deal with current immigration problems goes back to the George W. Bush administration. Former President Bush along with Sen. John McCain worked hard to pass a comprehensive immigration bill but were prevented from doing so by members of their own party. So for more that a decade this issue has raged. It can not be questioned that something must be done to resolve this crisis. It is also clear that conservative Republicans have prevented action on this matter. Earlier this year, the Senate with bipartisan support passed a comprehensive immigration bill that the House has refused to consider.

In the meantime the problem goes unresolved and in fact there continues to be no indication that Congress is prepared to act on the bill. Perhaps they prefer the oratory of amnesty to the hard work of making things better. The President has delayed action for a year now in hopes the House of Representatives would take
up the Senate bill. There has been no action. It seems to me that it only makes sense for the President to act when Congress refuses to do the people?s business. This should be a bipartisan issue. A number of Republicans want a bill, but they can?t control their own caucus.

The real problem is Congress simply can?t get the job done which is reason enough for the President to act. There is no indication Congress will pass a bill if the President does nothing, but his actions will provide an excuse to blame the President for their own failure to act.

Simon Maloy at Salon makes the case against Republicans for their failure to act on immigration. Earlier, they said they couldn?t pass immigration because they didn?t trust the President to enforce the law. The bottom line is they just can?t get it done at this time. Not even the chief Republican advocates for immigration are confident they can pass a bill. ?? Even the most optimistic Republican members, who in one breath acknowledge that the conservatives in the house are the major obstacle to reform, and in the next breath blame the White House for their party?s inertia on the measure,? Maloy writes.

Actually, executive action by the President should provide incentive for Republicans to act. They could then ensure that their wishes on the matter would be part of the debate. Maloy says it will take six months for any executive action by the President to go into effect. That gives the Congress more than enough time to act to override the President?s actions if they are serious about doing something.

What will happen if Republicans remain obstructionist on this matter? Immigration is a major issue for many reasons. It involves economics, security, family values, fairness, and our very humanity. Executive action by the President will hopefully delay some of the more extreme consequences of the current immigration mess. It will, however, not replace the need for Congress to act. Surely this newly elected Congress can do better than say, if the President acts we will just take our marbles and go home. Where are the adults in the room?

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