

## Immigration, Health Care Could Divide Republicans

Welcome again to As It Is from VOA Learning English. I'm Mario Ritter.

Here in Washington, the U.S. Congress is not in session. That means lawmakers are not meeting for business. So it is a good time to consider the debate over reform that has been taking place in the nation's capital in recent months.

"Wasting the country's time by taking something like 40 meaningless votes..."

"We are not just making noise."

Today on our program, we talk with VOA's national correspondent about two reform issues that have the country's major political parties -- the Democrats and Republicans -- locked in heated debate. We also explore why this is causing division in the Republican Party.

### Reform Issues May Divide Republicans

Political differences are nothing new to Washington and neither are public opinion studies. Recent surveys suggest that a large majority of Americans disapprove of the job that Congress is doing. A recent *Wall Street Journal*-NBC News poll shows that Congress has an 83 percent disapproval rate.

Democrats and Republicans have been struggling to find common ground on several very important issues. The Republicans control the House of Representatives, while the Democrats hold the Senate. The result is that many bills cannot pass both houses of Congress.

The Democrats are led by President Barack Obama. He has been speaking out against what he calls Republican inaction.

"Wasting the country's time by taking something like 40 meaningless votes to repeal Obamacare is not a jobs plan!"

The Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, has fought back.

"We are not just here making noise. The House Republicans are continuing to take action."

Lawmakers have not reached agreement on the federal budget or on spending issues like sequestration, a process that requires sharp spending cuts across the national government.

And reforming government seems to have divided lawmakers. Health care and immigration reform efforts have slowed or face strong opposition.

Today, we talk with VOA National Correspondent Jim Malone about immigration and health care reform. Welcome, Jim.

Thank You.

Now we have talked, a little bit earlier, about the immigration issue. Can you explain how immigration is causing stress to the Republicans, especially in regard to their position?

You have one group of Republicans who believe that unless they support some version of immigration reform, the party could become extinct in a few years.

The 2012 election showed that minority voters overwhelmingly supported the Democrats and President Obama. So this is a source of concern for a number of moderate and, what I would call, establishment Republicans, who want to find a way to Hispanics, to African Americans and to Asian American voters -- the fastest growing group in the United States.

But on the other side of this are conservative members of Congress, especially in the House of Representatives, where Republicans have the majority, who do not favor the kind of sweeping immigration reform that some Republican moderates and many Democrats prefer. These conservative Republicans believe that giving those who came into the country illegally a path to citizenship amounts to an amnesty. And they oppose that.

And the question is: How will they come to some sort of compromise that satisfies the conservative concerns about illegal immigration and border security, and still puts a new face on the Republican Party of openness to minority voters?

Jim, you're working on another reform issue which is health care. Now we have health care legislation in place and the changes are sort of staggered over several years. However, there has been a push to possibly defund some of the provision of what people call "Obamacare," the health care reform legislation. What are the prospects of that?

This is shaping up to me as a fascinating battle. And it's important it will go to the strength of the Republican Party -- whether it's a viable party in the near future in our elections and what will happen to President Obama's signature achievement of his term so far, which is health care reform. As you mentioned, the law has been passed by Congress; the main implementation of the law will occur in 2014. And Congress must begin to consider that as they fund the government for the next year.

And there's a very strong effort underway by a number of conservative Republicans who remain very disappointed the law was passed by Congress in the first place and would like to find a way to undo it. Their strategy is to try to force the administration's hand by holding Obamacare, as it's called, the health care law, hostage. They want to defund the law as part of any agreement to continue to fund the government past September 30, when the funding authority expires.

This is very much a political issue. And it's not just Republicans who favor defunding versus Democrats who would oppose it because they support the law. But there is a real split among Republicans as to whether this is the right way to proceed.

Jim Malone VOA's National Correspondent, thank you very much.

Thank you.

## On This Date...

On this date in 1782, George Washington ordered the creation of a Badge of Military Merit in Newburgh, New York. The badge was made in the shape of a purple heart with a silver edge. The award gives recognition to soldiers injured in action. Only three are known to have been given during the Revolutionary War. The award was not officially reestablished until February 22, 1932 on what would have been George Washington's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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