

Nuns on the Bus push Congress to pass immigration reform

by [Corrie Mitchell](#)

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WASHINGTON (RNS) The “Nuns on the Bus” are back from their 6,800-mile trek across the U.S., but their hardest job may be yet to come: convincing the Republican-led House to pass immigration reform.

The cross-country tour, a project of Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, was the nuns’ second cross-country trip after last year’s push to protest proposed budget cuts that the sisters said would hurt the poor.

When it comes to lobbying for comprehensive immigration reform, Sister Simone Campbell said even the Catholic bishops are on board with the Nuns on the Bus.

The nuns met with immigrants, business leaders and public officials, urging them to call on Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform. Campbell, who led the Nuns on the Bus, said that during their 22-day trip across 53 cities, only seven people came out to protest their immigration stance.

“The people of the United States are for comprehensive reform,” Campbell said to members of Congress and congressional staff at a briefing on Wednesday (July 24). “We are united in this and we cannot allow petty political intrigue — fear — to cripple us.”

The nuns are advocating for a “faithful way forward” for immigration reform, including changes that ensure family unity, protect the rights of immigrant workers and provide a clear, direct pathway to citizenship for all undocumented workers.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said the nuns’ principles mirror the priorities of House Democrats, who largely support an immigration bill that passed the Senate.

Both, she said, respect the dignity and worth of every person in America, regardless of immigration status.

“We do know that our country will be greater when their status is clearer and that we have the full benefit of families being united, workers being respected,” Pelosi said.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., who has tangled with the Catholic hierarchy before, called the nuns “a beacon for all of us” and said that the principles they are fighting for reflect not only Catholic teaching but American ideals.

Though the nuns welcomed the Senate immigration bill, Campbell called it “nuts on several levels,” particularly a provision to heavily increase border security.

The nuns had delivered 10,000 postcards to the Senate, but now they have plans for individual congressional lobby visits — and more postcards ready to be sent to House members. Campbell said the nuns have “18,000 cards that we have poised to get to key offices, the hard-headed as well as those that need encouragement.”

Many GOP House members say they’d prefer to tackle immigration reform through multiple smaller bills, rather than one comprehensive bill. Among those, House Judiciary Committee Chair Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., said he’s taking the issues one-by-one, and his committee has already passed four smaller immigration bills.

“Looking at smaller pieces is really important, but what we found on the road was these small pieces are integrated into a whole,” Campbell said. “And that the temptation is to think you can deal with any one piece individually, but the fact is they’re all integrated.”

The nuns have teamed up with the bishops and have their eyes set on the 61 GOP Catholic House members. More specifically, they are pinpointing lawmakers from Florida, Texas and California.

She said they’re appealing to these representatives’ Catholic faith while also trying to understand what they’re afraid of and how they can help alleviate that fear.

“We just have to make it politically feasible,” Campbell said. “They’re afraid of challenges from the far right, that’s the problem. So we have to say, ‘We have your back. We stand with you.’”