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By Greg Hinz

Question: What can bring together local politicians on both sides of the aisle like just about no other issue?

Answer: Apple pie and motherhood, I suppose. But definitely Polish immigration rights.

So far two Chicago-area progressives, a downstate conservative Republican who's thinking of running for governor and a Republican U.S. senator are sponsors of a move to reform the U.S. visa program. They are U.S. Reps. Mike Quigley of Chicago and Bill Foster of Naperville, both Democrats; Peoria Rep. Aaron Schock, a Republican, and Sen. Mark Kirk. Several other local solons are co-sponsoring.

Under their bill, the U.S. Visa Waiver Program would be modernized — in part by extending it to cover visitors from Poland.

The program now offers foreign nationals from 37 countries up to 90 days of visa-free travel here. But Poland doesn't qualify because its visa refusal rate here — one of the standards for inclusion in the program — is relatively high. The proposed law would allow federal authorities to waive that standard if no more than 10 percent of visitors from a given country overstayed their visa, an action that would benefit Poland.

Passing the bill “will strengthen our national security, provide valuable tourism revenue and enhance relationships with important allies like Poland, who have been frozen out,” Mr. Quigley said.

Mr. Kirk praised Poland as “a strong ally of the United States” that has played “a critical role in NATO military operations. . . .Now is the time to stand behind our Polish allies.”

Mr. Schock noted that he visited Krakow, Poland, for the first time in 2011, meeting with Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski.

“Our state has greatly benefited from the contributions of the local Polish community,” he said in a statement. “The Polish community has achieved high levels of home ownership, education and income, all characteristics we should continue to embrace.”

In case you weren't aware of it, Chicago and Illinois happen to be home to a huge Polish population, said to be the biggest outside of Warsaw. And those who are citizens are known to show up on Election Day.

Similar legislation was introduced in prior Congresses but did not pass. It should be interesting to see how it fares now, given all the talk about tightening the borders as part of Latino immigration reform.

Also backing the bill, as co-sponsors, are Reps. Luis Gutierrez, D-Chicago; Adam Kinzinger, R-Joliet; Dan Lipinski, D-Chicago; Jan Schakowsky, D-Evanston; Brad Schneider, D-Lincolnshire, and John Shimkus, R-Collinsville.

Now, if they only could get together this well on tax reform and balancing the federal budget.

