

Governors endorse guest worker plan; BUT WESTERNERS DON'T SAY WHICH VERSION IS BEST

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Body

The Western **Governors** Association called on Congress Tuesday to pass comprehensive immigration reform, including a temporary **quest worker** program.

The group that represents 18 Western states passed the policy resolution unanimously while meeting at the National **Governors** Association annual conference. The vote came as the Senate prepares to take up immigration legislation this spring.

"When you think about issues that impact the West, this immigration issue is really the top issue right now," **said** Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, a Democrat, who chairs the Western **governors** group.

"We believe that some of the rhetoric coming out of our nation's capitol vis-a-vis illegal immigration is unfounded and unwise, and what we really need is a very comprehensive approach to this issue," she **said**.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who in the past has **said** he supports a **quest worker** program that would require the **worker** to leave the United States after some years, **said** immigration policies are outdated and the federal government must deal with them.

"Ideally we have a perfect situation where you have people that want to work and you have companies that need **workers**, so you have supply and demand, but how do you make that work is really the big challenge," Schwarzenegger **said**.

There's strong disagreement on Capitol Hill over immigration legislation.

The Republican-controlled House passed an immigration bill in December that tightened border controls, authorized fencing portions of the border and made illegal presence in the United States a felony. The House measure did not include a **quest worker plan**. Democrats criticized the bill as too punitive.

The Senate Judiciary Committee will take up legislation Thursday by Chairman Arlen Specter, R-Pa., that includes a **quest worker** program and creates a new "conditional non-immigrant work authorization" status for illegal immigrants already in the United States. The immigrants could gain temporary legal status by paying back taxes and getting an employer to pay a fee.

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Specter's guest worker proposal is similar to a plan advanced by President Bush, and to a bill by Republican Sens. John Cornyn of Texas and Jon Kyl of Arizona. Those proposals would allow immigrants to stay in the United States for up to six years before returning to their home countries.

The Western Governors Association's resolution -- the group's first attempt to tackle the immigration issue -- did not offer details on how the temporary guest worker program would work. It also did not offer ideas on what to do about the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants now in the country.

The resolution called for building regional federal prisons to house illegal immigrants who commit crimes, and increasing the numbers of available green cards for general workers and H-1B visas for high-tech and other skilled workers.

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