

Immigration compromise collapses Sting for Bush • Bill was major domestic priority.

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Body

President George W. **Bush** suffered a devastating setback on his top **domestic priority** Thursday as a broad **immigration bill** fell through in the Senate amid an irreconcilable partisan standoff.

The 627-page **bill** was taken off the Senate floor at the end of a bitterly contentious day that saw the **bill's** sponsors desperately trying to resolve differences between Democrats and Republicans over GOP demands to offer additional amendments.

Senators, for the second time in a span of hours, voted overwhelmingly Thursday night against a motion to cut off debate, prompting Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., to pull the **bill**. But Reid and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., both declined to proclaim the **bill** dead and expressed hope of resuming work on the **bill** if they find a way out of the deadlock.

The prospects for reviving and ultimately passing the **bill** appeared uncertain, but supporters insisted it could be done.

"We're still open for business on this **bill**," said Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, a leading Republican supporter of the measure.

Crafted by a bipartisan group of senators after three months of negotiations with the White House, the **bill** seeks to legalize millions of undocumented immigrants, create a temporary guest worker program, toughen security along the U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada, and crack down on employers who hire illegal workers.

Bush, who has called for **immigration** changes since the outset of his presidency, has aggressively committed his administration to passing the **bill**, even criticizing Republicans who denounce it.

If the **bill** isn't revived, it would mark the president's second defeat on the issue within the span of a year and would invite a political backlash in advance of the 2008 presidential election.

Warnings surfaced throughout the day that the **bill** was in trouble after the Senate, by a vote of 63-33, rejected an initial motion to shut off debate. The second motion came hours later, at midevening, after a day of background negotiations and calls to lawmakers from White House emissaries.

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In the second test vote, 50 senators voted against a proposal to cut off debate, with 45 supporting it. The vote was well below the 60-vote supermajority needed for approval. Thirty-eight Republicans, 11 Democrats, and one independent voted against the motion, while seven Republicans, 37 Democrats and one independent voted for it.

Missouri Sens. Christopher "Kit" Bond, a Republican, and Claire McCaskill, a Democrat, voted against cutting off debate, while Illinois Sens. Dick Durbin and Barack Obama, both Democrats, voted to end it.

Durbin said he and other Democratic leaders were disappointed at the inability of **Bush** and Republican senators to rally their party around a **bill** that came largely from Republicans.

"What we have seen is a parade of horrors, amendment after amendment offered by Republicans who will never vote for this **immigration bill**, trying to embarrass those who support it," Durbin said earlier Thursday.

McCaskill said a number of the **bill's** aspects bothered her. "As a former auditor, I believe we should starve incompetent programs and not feed them," she said. "We clearly know that the guest worker program is a path to illegal **immigration**. So, I think we starve an incompetent government agency. We don't feed it."

Reid had pressed for the motions to begin winding down debate and limiting an onslaught of amendments that he claimed was aimed at killing the **bill**. The majority leader, while stressing the importance of **immigration** legislation, said the Senate had committed adequate time to the **bill** and needed to move on to other issues.

Republicans agreed among themselves to vote against ending debate to press their point that Democrats were bottling up needed amendments. In turn, Reid charged that the Republicans were engaging in stalling tactics and said he would withdraw the **bill** if the second vote to cut off debate failed.

"We need to have the record reflect that this **bill** isn't going anyplace, but it's not our fault," Reid told fellow senators at midday Thursday.

Talk

STLtoday.com/current What do you think of the how the Senate and the administration have handled the **immigration** issue? Talk about it in Current Affairs.

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