

Immigration compromise near

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Byline: Dave Montgomery, Knight Ridder

Body

Senators struggling to craft a comprehensive **immigration** overhaul **neared** a breakthrough Thursday with a tentative agreement that would put millions of illegal residents on a path toward permanent residency and U.S. citizenship.

The fragile accord infused new momentum into the Senate Judiciary Committee's efforts to shape legislation before the full Senate embarks on a two-week debate on **immigration** beginning March 27. But participants on both sides of the volatile issue acknowledge that the ultimate outcome in Congress is fraught with uncertainty.

President Bush has called for a comprehensive overhaul of the nation's **immigration** laws to toughen border enforcement and create a temporary guest-worker program that would cover undocumented workers now in the country.

The House of Representatives already has passed an **immigration** bill that toughens border enforcement but does not include a guest-worker provision, which Republican conservatives have denounced as a form of amnesty that rewards illegal behavior. Pro-immigrant groups say the bill falls far short of the overhaul they say is needed to address the more than 11 million illegal immigrants now in the United States.

But shortly after Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., the Judiciary Committee chair, announced that his panel was **nearing** agreement on the bipartisan **compromise**, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., said Thursday night that he would introduce his own bill that would be limited to border security and interior enforcement measures.

Frist's move was dismissed by some Capitol Hill observers as an effort to bolster his credentials with conservatives as he prepares for a possible presidential run. By introducing a bill with no guest-worker provisions, they said, Frist was hoping to highlight the difference between his approach to **immigration** and that of Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a potential rival and co-sponsor of guest-worker legislation.

Frist told reporters that he was acting only to ensure that a bill came to the floor in time to be fully debated and voted on before the Senate recesses for the summer.

The bipartisan bill, sponsored by McCain and Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., would enable undocumented immigrants to stay in the country for six years under temporary work visas after paying a \$1,000 fine and passing background checks. They could apply for permanent residency, or green cards, by paying an additional \$1,000 fine and meeting further requirements.

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The Los Angeles Times and Knight Ridder Staff Writer James Kuhnhehn contributed to this report.

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