

IMMIG BILL VICTORY. Senate OKs, but big battle looms

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Body

WASHINGTON - The **Senate** voted yesterday to legalize millions of illegal immigrants, but the measure faces a tough **battle** with House legislators who call it amnesty.

The House passed its own get-tough immigration law in December, focusing on enforcement and border security.

Now the two sides must meet to work out the differences - which may prove impossible.

"I can't see this **bill** going anywhere in the House," said Rep. Pete King (R-L.I.), chairman of the Homeland Security Committee and a likely negotiator on the **bill**. "We rightly consider it to be amnesty."

Under the **Senate bill**, illegal immigrants who have been in the United States more than two years would be allowed to stay if they pay a \$3,250 fine and have jobs and clean records.

People here less than five years would have to "touch back" to border posts and apply for work visas. Legalized immigrants could eventually apply for citizenship.

The **bill** also beefs up security and enforcement, but that may not be enough for the House. Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) has said he will only offer the **bill** for a vote if a majority of the GOP backs it.

His spokesman, Ron Bonjean, said Congress "needs to show an accomplishment" on immigration but said Hastert still "believes in strong border security, no amnesty, and no path to citizenship."

Before the **Senate** voted 62-36 for its version, many senators made speeches with an eye on swaying the House.

"We've taken a **bill** that the American people would have concluded was amnesty, and, at least by my lights, took the amnesty out while putting the security in," said **Senate** Majority Leader **Bill** Frist (R-Tenn.).

In praising his chamber's work, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) held up the example of Marine Staff Sgt. Riayan Tejada, a Dominican immigrant from Washington Heights killed in Iraq in 2003. "He loved this country so much that he gave his life to defend her," McCain said.

But King called the **Senate bill** a fraud, saying, "To me, no **bill** is better than a bad **bill**."

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He said a better plan would be to enforce existing laws, like cracking down on employers, and let more immigrants come in to fill jobs. "I think we have to increase the quotas. I would be for that," he said. "The question is how much, but that's what the debate should be about."

President Bush is backing the **Senate** version, and some Republicans worry they could be punished at the polls if they block it.

King said the GOP would suffer more if it backs the **Senate** version because conservatives would feel "betrayed" and stay home in November.

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