

Conflicting immigration bills could mean no action this year

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Body

A comprehensive **immigration bill** that answers President Bush's call for a guest-worker program appears to have enough bipartisan support to pass the Senate, guaranteeing a legislative collision with an enforcement-oriented House **bill**, several advocates on both sides of the issue predicted Tuesday.

"We're in some trouble in the Senate," said Paul Egan, government-relations director of the Federation for American **Immigration** Reform (FAIR), which supports the House **bill** and opposes the guest-worker concept as a form of amnesty for illegal **immigration**.

The Senate may well deadlock with the House because their positions differ so radically and the issue is too politically hot in this congressional election **year** for lawmakers on either side to compromise. That could doom all legislation to overhaul **immigration** this **year**.

The Senate Judiciary Committee voted 12-6 Monday to advance a comprehensive measure that would put millions of illegal immigrants on track to permanent legal status and allow up to 400,000 foreign workers each **year** to fill low-skilled jobs.

Egan said opponents of the measure put their hopes in the 435-member House, where a coalition of conservative Republicans has vowed to kill **immigration** legislation that includes a guest-worker plan. The 94-member coalition blocked inclusion of a guest-worker program in the **immigration bill** the House passed in December.

The House **bill** also makes illegal **immigration** a felony and calls for 700 miles of fences along the Southwest border.

"If the Senate follows the Judiciary Committee's lead, the prospects of getting a reform **bill** to the president's desk this **year** are slim, to say the least," said Rep. Tom Tancredo, R-Colo., coalition leader. "**No** plan with amnesty and a massive increase in foreign workers will pass the House."

Republicans have 55 seats in the Senate. Democrats have 44 and usually win support from the Senate's lone independent, James Jeffords of Vermont. Pro-immigrant groups believe they can count on support from at least nine Republicans, and possibly as many as 14. Senate Judiciary Committee chair Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and three other committee Republicans -- Sens. Sam Brownback of Kansas, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Mike DeWine of Ohio -- voted for the **bill**.

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The measure became entangled in parliamentary uncertainty Tuesday after Senate Majority Leader **Bill** Frist, R-Tenn., indicated that he might press ahead with a more limited border security measure similar to the one passed earlier by the House. Senators are expected to begin debate this week -- possibly as early as today -- and may vote on both measures.

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