

## **Effort to Resurrect Immigration Bill Begins; 2nd Chance Depends on Whether Reid Will Allow It**

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### **Body**

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Moments after senators shot down an immigration reform bill Thursday night, a rescue mission for the bipartisan compromise was dispatched, even as recriminations flew over its stunning collapse.

The chief architects of the bill are confident that they can resurrect their deal, and Republican and Democratic negotiators believe that they can reach agreement by early this week on the official sticking point: which conservative amendments would be considered before final passage. The list must be short enough for time-conscious Democrats, yet substantive enough for Republicans demanding to be heard.

But a second act will come only if Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) allows the immigration issue to return to the floor. And exactly where Reid stands on the bill is one of the many mysteries left smoldering after Thursday's defeat.

Another is why the White House -- which regards immigration reform as key to reviving public support for President Bush -- offered backing that was too little, too late to keep the legislation moving. Though Bush could not control the debate's timing, and was in fact in Europe all last week, administration officials did not show up on Capitol Hill until the bill was teetering on the brink.

Reid's motives have been a question mark from day one. Spokesman Jim Manley said his boss was prepared to support the immigration bill on final passage. But advocates had their doubts, given Reid's determination to limit debate, and the green light he gave to one of the bill's Democratic critics to twice offer an amendment to end a guest-worker program after five years. Supporters of the immigration bill viewed the measure, which passed on the second try, as a poison pill.

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) also drew criticism, both internally and from Democrats, for not quelling a conservative rebellion that ultimately delivered the death blow to the bill.

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In the end, the determination of the bill's opponents simply proved more overwhelming than the will of its supporters to tackle such a difficult issue. Within policy circles, immigration reform is viewed as vital, addressing both the growing demand for workers and the social costs of an illegal underclass. The public also generally supports the idea. In a recent Washington Post-ABC News poll, a narrow majority of voters -- 52 percent -- said they supported allowing illegal immigrants to remain in the United States, as long as they are penalized, while 44 percent opposed the idea.

But the two most obvious remedies -- the guest-worker program and a path to citizenship for illegal residents -- drew opposition from two of the most powerful forces on the political landscape. On the Democratic side, labor unions protested the guest-worker program as a threat to American jobs. Many conservatives loathed the path-to-citizenship provision, deriding it as "amnesty" for lawbreakers.

### An Optimistic Start

After a halting start last week, the Senate began churning through amendments at a rapid clip by Wednesday. The bill's architects believed they were on track for passage, certainly by early this week.

But Reid continued to insist that debate be cut off by Thursday, with a final vote on Friday night.

Then, late Wednesday, he allowed a second vote on sunseting the guest-worker program. The measure, offered by Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (D-N.D.), had previously failed by a single vote, but Dorgan was given a second chance just before midnight. This time, with the help of conservatives opponents -- who were seeking to kill the bill by any means -- Dorgan obtained a one-vote win.

Reid bristled when he was asked why he gave Dorgan a second chance. "This is a killer amendment? After five years, you'll take a look at how the program is working? I can't fathom why this is a bad amendment," he said.

Not until midday Thursday did it dawn on both sides that Reid was serious about finishing quickly. Across the Capitol, leaders of the House's Congressional Hispanic Caucus were wrapping up their presentation on immigration reform when an aide broke in with the news that the Senate leader would seek a second vote to end debate.

Rep. Joe Baca (D-Calif.), the caucus chairman, and Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (Ill.), the chief Democratic author of a major House immigration bill, dashed over to the Senate. But Reid did not see them until 6:30 p.m. Gutierrez implored him not to pull the bill from the Senate floor. To the millions of illegal immigrants in this country, it was "a matter of life and death," he said.

But Reid made it clear his mind was made. "His demeanor was, how should I say, decided on," Gutierrez said reluctantly. "That's all I'm going to say about it."

### GOP Worries

Republicans were no less panicked. For several hours Thursday afternoon, McConnell huddled in his office with Sen. Jon Kyl (Ariz.), the bill's lead Republican backer, along with more than half a dozen hard-line opponents. The idea was to allow the conservatives to vent and determine whether the GOP leadership could reach an accommodation. But it quickly became clear that there would be no deal.

Although the Senate had already accepted his amendment to make English the national language, Sen. James M. Inhofe (R-Okla.) demanded another vote on a tougher version. Sens. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) and Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.) wanted votes on about 10 amendments each, even though McConnell had told Reid that Republicans would accept a total of 13 additional amendments.

DeMint then went to the Senate floor to refuse every offer Reid would make on further amendments. Republican aides believed that the Reid strategy was clear: Democrats would cycle through GOP amendments all day long,

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then move to cut off debate, hoping to paint Republicans as intransigent if they said no. DeMint decided to head off the **effort** by refusing to let any amendments come up to a vote.

The move infuriated some senior Republicans, including Minority Whip Trent Lott (Miss.), who was urging the GOP leadership to take a harder line with the conservatives. But McConnell was reluctant to push too hard.

Then word spread that **Reid** planned a no-confidence vote on Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzalez for Monday. No longer were Republicans **willing** to accept **Reid's** assertion that the Senate could not spare one more day of debate. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez and Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff rushed to the Capitol, arriving at 7:15 p.m. to meet with senators in Vice President Cheney's office just off the Senate chamber. But the administration's **efforts** were fruitless: The second vote was a fait accompli.

Chertoff rejected the suggestions that the administration had not hustled. "They are going to have to fumigate the room because we were basically living there. Anyone who says we weren't engaged is ignorant of the facts." Bush **will** speak to Senate Republicans on Tuesday about **immigration** in a previously scheduled lunch.

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