

Immigration reform bills at standstill; CONGRESSIONAL INACTION COULD LIMIT STATE FUNDING

San Jose Mercury News (California)

August 7, 2006 Monday

Copyright 2006 San Jose Mercury News All Rights Reserved

The Mercury News

Found on BayArea.com

Section: A; Pg. 1

Length: 124 words

Byline: Frank Davies, MediaNews Washington Bureau

Body

Months of marches, hearings and passionate argument, along with fierce debate over two conflicting **bills** on **immigration**, have led to this: deadlock in **Congress** and no **immigration reform** this year.

That's the consensus on Capitol Hill and among policy experts. It's even shared by President Bush, who has pushed for a comprehensive **bill**. During a recent meeting, Bush told Mexican President Vicente Fox that no **immigration** overhaul was likely in 2006, Fox said.

This **inaction** means that California, with almost one-quarter of the nation's estimated 12 million illegal immigrants, will see **limited** improvements in border security, uneven enforcement at workplaces and great uncertainty for undocumented workers, said several policy and security experts.

"Expectations were raised for some sort of resolution, and this will only increase tension at the border and make problems even worse," predicted Stewart Verdery, former assistant secretary of Homeland Security.

Republicans, seriously divided on **immigration**, are also worried about the political impact of **inaction**. With Bush's active role on the issue and GOP control of **Congress**, failure to produce a **bill** "could be a real political problem for the party," said Rep. George Radanovich, R-Fresno.

Democrats are ready to pounce. "They're in charge, and this just adds to the image of a do-nothing **Congress**," Sen. Barbara Boxer said last week.

Advocates on all sides of the debate, from those who favor legalizing the status of illegal immigrants to those who want to crack down at the border and workplace, can agree on this: Delaying or ducking this issue is a big mistake, and will only make it more urgent and fractious next year.

"It's a dereliction of duty not to act, and it just forces some difficult issues on to the **states**," said John Keeley, communications director of the Center for **Immigration** Studies, which favors tougher enforcement.

He noted a surge this year in **bills** in **state** legislatures to deal with **immigration**. California, like other **states**, is wrestling with how much health coverage to provide the children of illegal immigrants and other issues.

'Deeply disappointed'

Immigration reform bills at standstill; CONGRESSIONAL INACTION COULD LIMIT STATE FUNDING

Larisa Casillas, an immigrant advocate in San Jose, said Bay Area residents with undocumented relatives and friends are "deeply disappointed" that Congress cannot agree on some process for eventual citizenship. But she said big rallies, like the one in San Jose on May 1, raised awareness among immigrants, who will stay active.

"The community is energized, and we're now concentrating on registering voters," said Casillas, policy director of Services, Immigration Rights and Education Network, a social services organization. She said immigration advocates are planning more marches for Labor Day.

The deadlock has persisted because the House and Senate produced two different bills, and House GOP leaders, unwilling to compromise, have refused to hold a conference to try to resolve the differences.

"I think both bills are dead," said Radanovich, who attended a recent strategy session at the White House.

That would mean no big infusion of money for border security. Both bills would add Border Patrol agents and hundreds of miles of fences on the Mexican border.

"We need more resources, but some gains in security will continue anyway," said Brian Goebel, former senior policy adviser to Customs and Border Protection.

Border Patrol boost

Since 2001, the Border Patrol has grown more than 40 percent, Goebel said, and new high-tech tracking, more detention facilities and coordination with the military and National Guard should cut down on the influx of illegal immigrants.

Verdery, who worked on border and transportation security at Homeland Security, said lower-profile issues -- better employment verification to screen undocumented workers, and the integration of agency databases -- are still under-funded.

Goebel, Verdery and eight other former security officials -- including ex-Coast Guard Commandant James Loy, who was deputy secretary of Homeland Security -- say enforcement is not enough. They support a guest-worker program and a process for some illegal residents to legalize their status.

"You're never going to enforce your way out of this problem," Verdery said. "As long as the jobs are here, people will find a way to get in."

The political fallout from this year's deadlock is difficult to predict, but Republicans, because of their leadership position, appear most vulnerable.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, a Republican eager to show his independence, has castigated GOP congressional leaders for inaction. Sen. Mel Martinez of Florida, the only Latino Republican in the Senate, has warned that the GOP risks alienating Latino voters with some of its anti-immigration rhetoric.

But "enforcement-only" Republicans insist that their active, vocal base opposed to any "amnesty" for illegal residents will help them this fall. They point to the special election victory in June of Republican Brian Bilbray, who won a House seat in San Diego after taking a hard line on immigration and criticizing Bush's immigration proposals.

This fall, the GOP's underdog challenger to Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein is former state Sen. Dick Mountjoy -- best known as the author in 1994 of Proposition 187, which would have denied government services to illegal immigrants.

Many political observers believe that measure drove Latino voters in California away from the GOP for years. Some recent national polls have shown a growing disenchantment among Latino voters with Bush and the GOP, but translating that into votes is a different matter.

Immigration reform bills at standstill; CONGRESSIONAL INACTION COULD LIMIT STATE FUNDING

Contact Frank Davies at fdavies@mercurynews.com or (202) 383-6008.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: IMMIGRATION (92%); US REPUBLICAN PARTY (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); POLITICAL PARTIES (90%); NATIONAL SECURITY (90%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (90%); PUBLIC POLICY (89%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); US CONGRESS (89%); US STATE IMMIGRATION LAW (78%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); POLITICAL DEBATES (78%); CONFERENCES & CONVENTIONS (78%); US STATE GOVERNMENT (78%); FOREIGN LABOR (78%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (77%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (76%); BORDER CONTROL (75%); VOTERS & VOTING (72%)

Organization: US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (56%)

Person: VICENTE FOX QUESADA (71%); BARBARA BOXER (57%); GEORGE RADANOVICH (57%)

Geographic: FRESNO, CA, USA (79%); SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, CA, USA (77%); SAN JOSE, CA, USA (72%); CALIFORNIA, USA (92%); MEXICO (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

Load-Date: August 7, 2006

End of Document