

Specter starts in Phila. on immigration road trip

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Body

Congress sets off tomorrow on a cross-country **immigration road** show with public hearings in **Philadelphia** and San Diego, Calif., to peddle two rival, and very different, border-control proposals.

The House and Senate were expected to negotiate a compromise on overhauling the nation's **immigration** laws when, in late June, House Speaker Dennis Hastert called for public input.

The hearings, coming before midterm elections on an emotional issue that has deeply divided the country, could prove fatal to passage of any law this year that determines the fate of the country's more than 11 million illegal immigrants.

Sens. Arlen **Specter** (R., Pa.) and Ted Kennedy (D., Mass.) - key players in crafting a Senate plan to legalize some immigrants, tighten border security, and create a temporary guest-worker program - are scheduled to hear testimony tomorrow on the proposals from invited witnesses at the National Constitution Center.

The public hearing, to be televised on C-Span, is set to begin at 10 a.m. Scheduled to testify are New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, **Philadelphia** Police Commissioner Sylvester Johnson, and Lou Barletta, mayor of Hazleton, Pa., the Poconos coal town that has tentatively passed an ordinance cracking down on illegal immigrants.

Other witnesses will include union and business representatives and the Rev. Luis Cortes Jr., a **Philadelphia** evangelical leader who is a prominent backer of President Bush and leader of Esperanza USA, a nationwide network of Latino community-development groups.

Meanwhile, the House will hold a hearing in San Diego on its own plan, which makes living in the United States without a valid visa a felony punishable by jail time. Currently, illegal immigrants break civil rather than criminal law.

The House bill also would make it a crime for any group, including churches, to help illegal immigrants, and would stiffen penalties against employers who hire illegal workers.

Both the House and Senate proposals would beef up the number of border-patrol and **immigration** agents and would build hundreds of miles of walls along the Mexico border.

President Bush, in a prime-time address in May, expressed strong support for provisions contained in the Senate bill.

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Specter told reporters late last month that the Senate Judiciary Committee, which he chairs and which oversees **immigration**, would hold hearings to balance those organized by Hastert. He said that he did not want the competing hearings to derail efforts to reach a middle ground, but that it was necessary to hear from farmers, landscapers and others on the importance of guest workers to the economy.

He said he also wanted to highlight "the disadvantage to the country on creating a fugitive class of 11 million undocumented immigrants."

"They are marked as felons under the House bill," **Specter** told reporters. "And what are you going to do with them? You going to round them up? You going to push them into hiding? My thinking has been they can't be ignored."

The Senate will hold additional hearings on **immigration** this summer, but has not yet set dates and locations. The House will hold hearings in Arizona, California, Texas - border states most affected by illegal immigrant crossings - in July and August.

Public Hearing on **Immigration** Bill

What: The Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a public hearing on **immigration** tomorrow in **Philadelphia**.

Sens. Arlen **Specter** (R., Pa., and Ted Kennedy (D., Mass.), will hear testimony on the Senate's plan to overhaul the nation's **immigration** laws.

When: **Starting** at 10 a.m.

Where: National Constitution Center, Sixth and Market Streets, **Philadelphia**.

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