

Change in immigration bill could endanger legislation House may object to Senate provision to penalize employers who falsely classify workers as contractors.

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Body

The state **Senate** on Tuesday added a **provision** to a broad **immigration bill** that would crack down on **employers** who **falsely classify** their **workers**, potentially jeopardizing legislators' efforts to pass an **immigration** measure this session.

The **provision** adds penalties for **employers** who misclassify **workers** as "**contractors**." By doing that, **employers** don't have to withhold taxes.

"This is for those **employers** that tell the illegal immigrant, 'Don't fill out any forms, I'm just going to pay you cash,'" said Sen. Tim Green, D-Spanish Lake, who offered the **provision**.

Bill sponsor Sen. Scott Rupp, R-Wentzville, said the **provision** would be "radioactive" to **House** leaders, pleading for senators to reject the **provision**.

Despite the pleadings, the **Senate** added the **provision** in a resounding voice vote.

Afterward, Rupp said efforts to pass the **bill** aren't dead.

"I would hope that they would do the right thing," he said of the **House**. "The taxpayers want us to move an illegal **immigration bill** that has a strong **employer** component."

Rupp said that if the Legislature doesn't pass an **immigration bill** cracking down on **employers** who hire illegal **workers**, he would lobby Gov. Matt Blunt to call a special session to deal with the issue.

"Those that are fearful of the **changes** we're suggesting should be very fearful," he said.

Business groups have been balking at the **employer provisions**, which would strip business licenses from **employers** who knowingly hire illegal **workers**. But, if businesses enroll in a federal employment verification system known as E-Verify, they would be exempt from those **provisions**.

Business leaders note E-Verify's 4 percent error rate and say the new law could open the door to harassment.

Other **provisions** of the **bill** would prohibit public benefits to illegal immigrants, require police to check the status of those who are jailed and prohibit cities from harboring illegal immigrants. A **provision** to ban illegal immigrants from attending state colleges was left out of the new version.

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Senators were debating the bill Tuesday evening. The session ends Friday.

The bill is HB 1549.

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