

## **Defeat Worries Employers Who Rely on Immigrants**

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### **Body**

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While the **defeat** of the Senate immigration bill was a dismaying disappointment to illegal **immigrants** and the groups that support them, it also created major **worries** for **employers** across the country who depend on **immigrant** workers.

**Employers** from food-processing industries and agriculture as well as construction contractors and commercial landscapers were among the most persistent forces pushing for passage of the Senate bill, which failed yesterday when senators voted 53 to 46 not to proceed to a vote. The measure would have provided a path to legal status for millions of illegal **immigrants**, who make up a significant percentage of workers in many low-wage, labor intensive industries.

The bill's **defeat** was hailed yesterday by conservative groups and others who said it would have rewarded law-breaking **immigrants** and would have wrongly excused the **employers** who hired them. Now, **employers** say they face a bleak landscape of intensified raids by the immigration authorities and growing pressure to purge illegal **immigrants** from their work force, but no new options to bring in temporary foreign workers or help illegal workers become legal.

"It leaves most of our guys in a pretty tough spot," said Brewster Bevis, director of legislative affairs for Associated Builders and Contractors, a national organization of construction businesses. "Most of our members are good actors, they believe the workers they have hired are legal," Mr. Bevis said. "But they wanted this reform so they can sleep better at night and don't have to fear potentially being visited by ICE," the federal Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agency.

Meatpacking **employers** were especially concerned about the **defeat** of the bill. Senate conservatives who opposed it, backed by a surge of support from irate voters, said they wanted to secure the nation's borders and crack down on **employers** of illegal **immigrants** before considering legalization measures.

"Immigration policy is divorced from enforcement, and the American **employer**, for one, is caught in the middle," said Jack Shandley, a vice president at Swift & Company, a meatpacking company in Greeley, Colo. Immigration agents arrested 1,282 Swift workers in raids last December that cost the company more than \$45 million in lost production and worker replacement costs.

Leaders on all sides of the unusual coalition of business groups and **immigrant** advocate organizations that supported the bill said they would have to hunker down with a status quo they called dysfunctional.

"More people are going into hiding," said Juan Salgado, president of the Illinois Coalition for **Immigrant** and Refugee Rights, based in Chicago, which works with many illegal **immigrants**. Mr. Salgado said most illegal **immigrants** had family ties to legal **immigrants** and American citizens and would not be likely to return to their home countries despite the heightened risk of deportation.

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"What it means in practice," he said, "is that every day you get in the car and go to work to feed the children, but you are thinking: I may not come back. If they take me what happens to my family?"

**Immigrant** advocates said many illegal **immigrants** were not acutely disappointed because they had not had high expectations that the bill would pass.

The setback was more significant for the **employers**, who were represented by the American Chamber of Commerce and the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition. Supporting the bill was a tricky proposition for many **employers**, and their advocacy remained muted through the debate. They had to call for legalizing illegal workers without admitting they employed any in their own work sites.

Business leaders said they were troubled to find themselves on the wrong side of Republican lawmakers who had long been their allies. One of the most active companies behind the bill was Pilgrim's Pride, the nation's largest chicken company, with 56,500 workers, based in Pittsburg, Tex. Senators John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison, both Republicans of Texas, voted to kill the bill.

Cliff Butler, vice chairman of Pilgrim's Pride, said he was dismayed by calls from the bill's opponents for stepped-up deportation of illegal **immigrants**. "I was surprised by how little import was given to the impact of that on millions of good people, and what it would to our economy to remove that labor force," Mr. Butler said. "They just ignored that totally."

Farmers and construction contractors said they anticipated labor shortages. They **worried** that they would have to continue to **rely** on the existing system for verifying the immigration status of new hires, which is known as Basic Pilot, even though it is error-prone and inefficient. Swift had participated for years in the program before the raids last year.

Farming and farm worker groups were slightly more optimistic. A proposal for a temporary worker program for agriculture, known as AgJobs, was incorporated into the Senate bill. Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, said she would seek to revive AgJobs in coming months by attaching it to other legislation.

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