

# **Senate Republicans Agree on Immigration Bill; Wide Bipartisan Support Would Break Logjam**

The Washington Post

April 6, 2006 Thursday, Final Edition

Copyright 2006 The Washington Post



**Section:** A Section; A18

**Length:** 1049 words

**Byline:** Jonathan Weisman, Washington Post Staff Writer

## **Body**

---

**Senate Republicans** reached agreement last night on a compromise **immigration** measure that they believe will garner enough **bipartisan support** to **break** through a parliamentary impasse that has stymied progress on a high-stakes border security **bill** for two weeks.

Under the agreement, the **Senate** would allow undocumented workers a path to lawful employment and citizenship if they could prove -- through work stubs, utility **bills** or other documents -- that they have been in the country for five years. To attain citizenship, those immigrants would have to pay a \$2,000 penalty, back taxes, learn English, undergo a criminal background check and remain working for 11 years.

Those who have been here a shorter time would have to return to one of 16 designated ports of entry, such as El Paso, Tex., and apply for a new form of temporary work visa for low-skilled and unskilled workers. An additional provision still under consideration would disqualify illegal immigrants who have been in the country less than two years.

In a surprise move last night, **Senate** Majority Leader **Bill** Frist (R-Tenn.) went to the floor with a parliamentary motion to send the compromise to the **Senate** Judiciary Committee for ratification, then scheduled a vote for tomorrow to cut off debate on that motion.

A final breakthrough was held back yesterday by **Senate** Minority Leader Harry M. Reid (Nev.), who insisted that any substantive compromise wait until a showdown vote to cut off debate on a more lenient measure passed by the Judiciary Committee last week. Reid and other Democratic leaders hope to show they have 60 votes in **support** of that **bill**, written by Sens. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.). That showdown should come this morning, and if they can **break** a possible filibuster, they could show no compromise is needed that would fundamentally change the McCain-Kennedy **bill**.

As of last night, however, the vote to **break** a filibuster appeared almost certain to fall short of the 60 supporters needed -- in large part because of the bruised **Republican** feelings over Reid's parliamentary tactics that have tied up the **Senate** for days. Even McCain said he would not bow to the Democrats' tactics and vote to end debate.

## Senate Republicans Agree on Immigration Bill; Wide Bipartisan Support Would Break Logjam

That would open the door to the new compromise, co-written by Sens. Mel Martinez (R-Fla.) and Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.). But **Senate** Democrats last night said they had not seen the compromise, much less approved it.

"We don't even know what's in it," said Reid spokesman James Patrick Manley.

If the compromise fails, the **Senate** will leave Washington this weekend for a two-week spring recess and nothing to show for a fortnight of heated debate. That would allow organizers of a national protest Monday against a crackdown on illegal **immigration** to build pressure on lawmakers to **support** the McCain-Kennedy measure, which would permit virtually all illegal immigrants, no matter how long they have been in the United States, to stay and work toward citizenship.

"If we don't get something worked out by sunrise, then the **Senate** Democrats are going to be cut out," warned Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.), voicing the frustration of a GOP majority that has been outflanked by the Democratic leadership.

"This whole thing hinges on Reid. He is the fulcrum on whether anything happens," said Don Stewart, spokesman for Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.).

That was a remarkable turn of events for a **Republican** Congress much more accustomed to steamrolling the Democratic minority. In an extraordinary showdown yesterday, Frist assembled most of the 55 **Republicans** in the **Senate** chamber to castigate Reid's intransigence.

"I used to say this is another insufferable attempt of the other side to block, to obstruct, to postpone, to delay, but now I think it's beyond that," Frist protested.

Facing one side of the chamber full of **Republican** senators, Reid stood virtually alone, responding, "The majority can move forward with a **bill** that will fix our borders and reform our **immigration** system or continue to stonewall this. It's in the eyes of the beholder who's stonewalling."

There is virtual unanimity in the **Senate** that the **immigration** system is **broken**. Of the several **immigration bills** that have been drafted, all would beef up the Border Patrol with more agents and higher technology, strengthen rules against employing illegal immigrants and penalties for businesses that violate those rules, and create tamper-proof identification cards to replace easily forged Social Security cards and other documents used to get jobs.

But senators have splintered on what to do with immigrants already in this country. One approach, championed by Cornyn and Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), would demand that all undocumented workers return home and apply for a new two-year temporary work visa. Such visas could be renewed for a total of six work years, but workers would have to return to their home countries for a year before reapplying.

McCain maintains that approach is unrealistic, arguing that illegal immigrants would ignore the new visas and remain underground.

Other senators, including conservative **Republican** Johnny Isakson (Ga.) and moderate Democrat Ben Nelson (Neb.), favor the approach taken by the House in December, when it passed a **bill** that cracked down on illegal **immigration** without offering any new avenue for lawful employment or citizenship. A handful of Democrats, led by Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (N.D.), resolutely oppose the provision in the McCain-Kennedy **bill** that would offer about 400,000 work visas a year to low-skilled foreigners seeking access to a U.S. workplace.

In the middle of the factions is President Bush, who for years has called for major changes in **immigration** laws, including a guest-worker program, but to many members of Congress has been maddeningly vague about just what he wants.

Yesterday, Bush demanded "a **bill** that will help us secure our borders, a **bill** that will cause the people in the interior of this country to recognize and enforce the law, and a **bill** that will include a guest-worker provision that will enable us to more secure the border, will recognize that there are people here working hard for jobs Americans won't do, and a guest-worker provision that is not amnesty, one that provides for automatic citizenship."

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** **IMMIGRATION** (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (90%); CITIZENSHIP (90%); POLITICAL PARTIES (90%); LEGISLATION (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (90%); AGREEMENTS (90%); US **REPUBLICAN** PARTY (89%); FILIBUSTER (89%); POLITICS (89%); US DEMOCRATIC PARTY (89%); PASSPORTS & VISAS (78%); EMPLOYMENT VISAS (78%); FOREIGN LABOR (78%); BORDER CONTROL (77%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (73%); NATIONAL SECURITY (72%); BACKGROUND CHECKS (72%); US PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES 2008 (71%); PROTESTS & DEMONSTRATIONS (60%)

**Person:** CHUCK HAGEL (79%); HARRY REID (79%); JOHN MCCAIN (78%); TED KENNEDY (59%); MEL MARTINEZ (59%)

**Geographic:** EL PASO, TX, USA (56%); ARIZONA, USA (79%); NEBRASKA, USA (79%); TEXAS, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%)

**Load-Date:** April 6, 2006