

GOP AND WHITE HOUSE MAKE IMMIGRATION DEAL

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Body

Republican leaders, bowing to White House demands, agreed Saturday to remove the most controversial provisions from a bill clamping down on illegal immigration, paving the way for congressional approval.

A deal reached in negotiations that stretched overnight into Saturday morning stripped language that would have made even legal immigrants liable for deportation if they used government relief programs for one year out of their first seven in the country.

It also eased proposed income standards required of Americans seeking to sponsor entry of close family members.

And it dropped a provision that would have allowed states to deny public education to children who are illegal aliens.

President Bill Clinton hailed the accord during a trip to Rhode Island, saying it combated illegal immigration "without hurting innocent children or punishing legal immigrants."

The revised immigration measure was to be included in a huge bill funding much of the government for the coming fiscal year, which starts Tuesday. A vote in the House was expected late Saturday, with the Senate voting Monday or Tuesday.

Many Democrats had called the provisions in parts of a section called Title 5, targeting legal immigrants, "mean-spirited" and the White House refused to accept them.

Rep. Howard Berman, D-Calif., who served on the congressional negotiating team, said: "Basically, all the worst provisions of Title 5 are out."

The agreement also removed a ban on government-paid treatment for AIDS for legal and illegal aliens.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., told a news conference that Republicans had yielded to the White House on some issues "in order to get everything done."

He said the administration had been adamant on allowing an illegal immigrant to have government-paid treatment for AIDS as well as emergency medical services.

The immigration bill approved by the House earlier this week would have required a sponsor of an immigrant to have an income of 140 percent of poverty level to sponsor immigration of a spouse or minor child or 200 percent to sponsor other close family members.

Under the accord, a sponsor would need an income of 125 percent of poverty level, and greater flexibility is allowed.

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The idea is to make sure the immigrant does not become a public charge. But critics had said millions of Americans would have been denied the right to petition for family members to enter the Unites States.

The House author of the bill, Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, said all provisions aimed at stemming illegal immigration were retained.

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