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# **Bush Urges Congress to Develop Immigration Reform Bill**

By JOHN HOLUSHA and CARL HULSE

Saying that "massive deportation" of illegal immigrants already in the country "is not going to work," President Bush said today that immigration reform remained one of his top priorities and urged Congress to overcome partisan differences and develop a comprehensive bill.

The president made it clear that he preferred the Senate's approach, which would deal with the issue of undocumented immigrant workers, to the House of Representatives proposal that would convert them into felons. The House bill was passed last December.

The Senate plan, which did not reach a final vote before Congress left for a recess two weeks ago, would treat illegal immigrants differently depending on how long they have been in the country. Sponsors said this was in recognition that longer-term immigrants were more likely to have established families and have children who are American citizens.

The Senate plan is an "interesting approach," Mr. Bush said in a speech and in a question-and-answer session in Orange County, Calif. He also said he favored a temporary guest worker program for employers who need immigrant labor and would "never grant automatic citizenship" to people who entered the country illegally.

The president renewed his call for reform legislation as Congress returned to Washington and Senate leaders were expected to revive a stalled compromise, after being prodded by large demonstrations during the recess.

Two weeks after the Senate walked away from its immigration debate, leaders of both parties are expressing a new sense of urgency to act before the November midterm elections. Mr. Bush, who has made an immigration bill a centerpiece of his legislative agenda, could use a victory on Capitol Hill to revive his flagging second term.

Speaking today to reporters traveling with the president, Scott McClellan, his spokesman, said: "He'll be talking about the importance of getting comprehensive immigration reform passed. I expect he will talk about the agreement that was reached in the Senate. It was a good, bipartisan agreement."

The compromise, devised by Senators Chuck Hagel and Mel Martinez, both Republicans, had the support of a sizable majority of senators before procedural disputes stalled progress.

Under the proposal, illegal immigrants who had lived in the United States for five years or more would eventually be granted citizenship, provided they stayed employed, had background checks, paid fines and back taxes and learned English.

Those here two to five years would have to move to a border crossing and apply for a temporary worker visa. They would be eligible for citizenship over time, but would have to wait longer than the first group.

Those here less than two years would be required to leave the country. They could apply for the temporary work program, but would not be guaranteed positions.

After an Easter recess punctuated by large immigrant rights protests, both Democrats and Republicans say their colleagues recognize that if they do not press ahead it could stir a reaction from those who want stricter border enforcement, business operators who rely on foreign workers and advocates of immigrant rights.

"We're not going to be stampeded, but at the same time we understand that there is a giant problem out there," said Senator Arlen Specter, Republican of Pennsylvania and chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, who set a hearing for Tuesday on the economic impact.

Mr. Specter said Sunday that he intended to use a White House meeting the same day to encourage Mr. Bush to "get into the fray now" by getting House and Senate Republicans to reconcile differences before the Senate passes a bill. "The time has come for specifics," Mr. Specter said.

Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the Democratic leader blamed by Republicans for tying up the legislation, and Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, a chief architect of the Senate measure that fell apart two weeks ago, also called on Mr. Bush to get involved. In interviews, each said the president must push back against conservatives who want to limit the legislation to stronger border enforcement.

"The president is going to have to weigh in on this," Mr. Reid said Sunday. "Somebody has to stand up to the right wing that is not allowing us to go forward."

A spokesman said Sunday that the president was eager to work with Congressional leaders to advance a bill. "The president's position is that it is important to keep that legislation moving," said Ken Lisaius, deputy White House press secretary.

Mr. Bush has shown little appetite for the give and take of negotiations, preferring to outline his goals and leave details to his Congressional allies. But those allies are now feuding bitterly among themselves.

Some Senate Republicans, led by John McCain of Arizona, champion an approach mixing stiffer border controls with potential citizenship for some illegal immigrants. But conservatives in the House and the Senate balk at talk of legal residency for those in the country illegally.

"The differences between the two approaches are so great, I do not know how you connect those dots," said Representative Tom Tancredo, Republican of Colorado, who favors more border enforcement. "The idea of providing amnesty, which is inherent in every one of the Senate plans, is abhorrent to most members of the House Republican Conference."

Senator Bill Frist of Tennessee, the majority leader, said Saturday in an article for National Review Online that he wanted to finish immigration legislation by the end of May. But he will face resistance from some in his own party.

Senator Jeff Sessions, Republican of Alabama, said he was leery. "We need to think very seriously about how we want immigration to be conducted in the future," Mr. Sessions said, citing estimates of 30 million new arrivals in the next decade. "Just passing 'something' is not respectful of the American people."

Immigration will not be the first order of business for the Senate. Lawmakers will consider a \$106.5 billion emergency spending measure for the war in Iraq and hurricane recovery, which will expose another Republican split over spending.

That fight will push any immigration bill into the first week of May at the earliest. But trying to assuage conservatives and ease the way for a broader bill, Republicans want to add \$2 billion to the emergency spending bill for additional border agents and enforcement tools like fences for high-traffic areas and new surveillance aircraft.

"Under any circumstances, security has to come first," Mr. Frist wrote in his article.

Mr. Reid, who two weeks ago resisted a Republican push for a series of conservative amendments to a bipartisan compromise on immigration, said in an interview that he was willing to agree to what he described as a reasonable number of them. But he said Mr. Frist, Mr. McCain and other Republican backers of a broad measure would eventually have to join Democrats in forcing a final vote if they wanted to produce a bill.

Mr. Reid and Mr. Specter called for guarantees on how the Senate would conduct immigration talks with the House, including a commitment that senators would not give in to House conservatives.

The Senate returns to its debate on the issue as immigrant advocacy groups plan an economic boycott on May 1, the latest in a series of large-scale demonstrations that have sharpened Congressional focus on the issue. Some lawmakers and members of the public have been upset at foreign flags at the rallies. Some predict that the proposed national school and job walkout could stir a stronger negative reaction.

"There is some real concern about the marches," said Representative Steve Chabot, an Ohio Republican who played host to Mr. McCain for a campaign event during the recess but does not share his position on immigration. "For the most part, people think we ought to control our borders."

John Holusha reported from New York for this article and Carl Hulse from Washington. Sheryl Gay Stolberg contributed reporting from Washington.