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As Senators Debate Immigration Bill, Frist Offers His Own

By RACHEL L. SWARNS

WASHINGTON, March 16 — Senator Bill Frist, the Republican leader, introduced a stringent border security bill on Thursday, rejecting pleas from senators in his own party who appealed for more time to finish legislation that would create a guest worker program for foreigners and a legal remedy for millions of illegal immigrants already in the United States.

Mr. Frist said his bill would include several measures already hammered out in negotiations under way in the Senate Judiciary Committee, which had included an increase in the number of border guards, more fencing along the Mexican border and faster deportation of illegal immigrants. But Mr. Frist's bill would not create the temporary worker program that President Bush has urged to legalize the status of the 11 million illegal immigrants thought to be in this country.

"Our country needs security at our borders in order to slow the flow of illegal immigration and make America safer from foreign criminals and terrorists," said Mr. Frist, of Tennessee.

Mr. Frist said he had decided to pre-empt the Judiciary Committee's work to ensure that the Senate meet his goal of holding a vote on immigration the week of March 27. He said the committee's legislation could replace his bill as the starting point for a floor debate if the senators completed their work in time.

The decision put him at odds with Senator Arlen Specter, the Pennsylvania Republican who is chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and highlighted divisions within the Republican Party over immigration.

"I think it is a colossal mistake to take this to the floor," Mr. Specter said early on Thursday. He sounded more conciliatory after meeting with Mr. Frist. Addressing reporters with Mr. Frist at his side, Mr. Specter said he would have preferred a different outcome but was optimistic that his committee could complete its legislation in time for it to be considered on the Senate floor..