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# Senate Leaders Expect Immigration Bill Next Week

By DAVID STOUT

WASHINGTON, May 11 — Senate leaders said today that they had broken a political stalemate and would bring to the floor next week an immigration bill that could put millions of illegals on the road to eventual American citizenship.

An agreement reached today by Senators Bill Frist of Tennessee and Harry Reid of Nevada, the Republican majority and Democratic minority leaders, ends an impasse that has stalled action in the Senate for weeks while immigrants and their advocates have been holding huge demonstrations across the country.

The deal does not mean that a bill will emerge from Congress soon. But it is significant that the Senate leaders agree to move forward, because the chamber operates under peculiar rules and traditions that can bury legislation indefinitely. Mr. Frist and Mr. Reid said they hope to schedule a vote before Memorial Day.

Even if the Senate passes an immigration bill, it would have to be reconciled with a bill enacted in December by the House. That bill generally emphasizes border security rather than attainment of citizenship, so negotiations between Senate and House would probably be long and heated.

"What the Democratic leader and I have laid out is a way to get on to this bill, and as you can tell, both of us are working in very good faith on the various issues that have been raised on the floor," Mr. Frist said.

"I welcome the return of the immigration bill to the Senate floor," Mr. Reid said. "America's immigration system is broken, and our national security depends on Republicans and Democrats finding common ground to fix it. The assurances I have received from Senator Frist make me hopeful we can finally move forward on real comprehensive reform."

The leaders' comments indicated that they had resolved the issue that had kept them apart: how many amendments to consider, and how much time to devote to them.

"I didn't get everything that I wanted," said Mr. Reid, who blocked votes on amendments weeks ago, saying they were intended to gut the legislation. "I think the majority leader didn't get everything he wanted."

Mr. Frist said there would be "a considerable number of amendments debated and voted on each day," and that they would be handled "in an efficient way."

Until partisan bickering sidetracked legislation in the Senate in early April, the chamber was working on a package that offered opportunities for eventual citizenship, a guest worker program for some immigrants and measures to enhance border security. The tougher House bill focuses on border security and would crack down on illegal immigrants and those who employ them.

Mr. Frist said 14 Republicans and 12 Democrats will negotiate with House members once the Senate passes an immigration bill. Seven of the Republicans and five of the Democrats will come

from the Judiciary Committee, with the remaining negotiators to be picked by Mr. Frist and Mr. Reid.

President Bush has said he favors legislation that would enable immigrants to become citizens, but only after they meet strict standards. He has said repeatedly that he does not favor "amnesty," a word that is anathema to many conservatives. "We congratulate the Senate on reaching agreement, and we look forward to passage of a bill prior to Memorial Day," Dana Perino, deputy White House press secretary, told The Associated Press.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, called the agreement announced today "a major step forward in our fight for tough but fair immigration reform."

"Business and labor, Democrats and Republicans, religious leaders and the American people strongly support our plan to strengthen our borders, provide a path to earned citizenship for those undocumented workers who are here and put in place a realistic guest worker program for the future," Mr. Kennedy said.

But quick passage is by no means assured, given the complexity of the immigration debate, the emotion it stirs and the approaching elections. Representative John A. Boehner of Ohio, leader of the House Republican majority, said in late April that he opposed the emerging Senate legislation and its emphasis on citizenship attainment. "I don't think that would be supported by the American people," he said.

But the accord announced by Mr. Frist and Mr. Reid apparently means that immigration legislation will not sink out of sight in "the procedural quagmire that the Senate is," as Mr. Reid put it recently.