

# Senators reach agreement on immigration reform

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WASHINGTON — Capping months of back-room talks, a bipartisan group of senators reached agreement today on a deal that would benefit millions of illegal immigrants, reorder the U.S. legal immigration system and toughen border security.

The deal, struck by about 10 Democrats and Republicans working with the Bush administration, heads to the Senate floor next week.

While negotiators expressed optimism that it would garner widespread support from both Democrats and Republicans, immigrant-rights groups, labor unions, business and other interests have expressed concern about different aspects of the sprawling legislation. And conservatives are sure to be hammered with complaints from their base that any deal legalizing illegal immigrants is tantamount to amnesty.

In the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., made no commitments to embrace the Senate deal, which differs in many ways from the leading bill the House intends to take up in July.

The Senate deal would:

- Grant the nation's estimated 12 million illegal immigrants legal status with an indefinitely renewable "Z" visa, and allow many to eventually apply for citizenship. They would have to pay \$5,000 in fines to get the visa, and those seeking legal permanent residence would have to return to their home country to apply.
- Establish a temporary worker program admitting 400,000 workers yearly for a two-year visa after which they would be required to return home for a year and then re-apply. The vast majority of the temporary workers would not be eligible to stay in the U.S. permanently.
- Add 6,000 more Border Patrol agents, establish an employment verification system mandatory for employers to check the status of new hires, and toughen interior enforcement.
- Tip the legal immigration system more towards rewarding high-skilled, educated immigrants, though it also would continue to allow U.S. residents to bring in relatives, though on a more limited basis.

Though the negotiators expressed confidence that their deal would be widely approved, there were signs that the agreement isn't universally admired.

Three of the negotiators — Texas Republicans Kay Bailey Hutchison and John Cornyn and New Jersey Democrat Robert Menendez — were not on stage when the deal was announced.

Speaking before the deal was struck, Hutchison said her support was contingent on reading the entire bill, which has yet to be fully written. "It's going to be very important to me to have the written word to see exactly what is in the bill," she said.

Cornyn, who battled Democrats to stiffen enforcement, voiced displeasure today with the broad outlines of the deal.