

# Senators work to revive immigration bill

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Key Republican and Democratic senators are reaching for a deal to resurrect their stalled immigration compromise by requiring that some \$4 billion be spent on border security and workplace enforcement.

The mandatory security funding is part of a plan to attract more Republican support for the measure, which grants legal status to millions of unlawful immigrants.

In private meetings Wednesday, the bipartisan group that crafted the delicate compromise was hammering out a plan to allow votes on a limited set of Republican- and Democratic-sought changes in exchange for a commitment from GOP holdouts that they will back moving ahead with the bill.

Republican architects of the measure, which grants legal status to millions of unlawful immigrants, expressed confidence that such an agreement was possible as early as Thursday.

"The list is there," said Sen. Mel Martinez (news, bio, voting record), R-Fla., adding that GOP senators were ready to present their plan to Senate leaders.

With the tentative package, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (news, bio, voting record) "should have what he needs to move forward," said Sen. Jon Kyl (news, bio, voting record), R-Ariz. "This is just to let him know that it can be done."

Reid has said he would revive the measure if at least 20 more Republicans commit to moving ahead with the broad immigration bill. It stalled last week when only seven GOP senators supported a Democratic bid to limit debate and expedite a final vote.

Reid expressed optimism that negotiators would strike a deal that could pave the way.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, the lead Democratic negotiator, said he supported the bid to provide mandatory funding for border security and enforcement.

"You give the assurance that when this is signed, that there are going to be the resources to do the kind of security protections that are in this legislation," Kennedy said.

Under the proposal by Kyl and Sen. Lindsey Graham (news, bio, voting record), R-S.C., border security and workplace enforcement would be funded up front, and eventually covered by the fines and fees set out in the broader immigration bill.

"Everybody's trying to prove that they are willing and able to enforce the law this time, unlike 1986," Kyl said, referring to the last major immigration overhaul, which established a one-year amnesty program for illegal immigrants who had been in the U.S. at least four years.

"What better way to demonstrate that other than to say, 'We're not going to let congressional appropriations dictate this — we are going to put the money up front,'" Kyl said.

As part of the tentative deal, the Senate would vote on a proposal by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (news, bio, voting record), R-Texas, to require all illegal immigrant household heads to return to their countries of origin before obtaining legal status, Graham said. Under the legislation, only those seeking green cards — permanent legal residency — would be required to return home first.

Negotiators spent hours Wednesday huddled in meetings or on the phone. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, who with Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez helped craft the bill in a series of intense and secretive talks earlier this year, was again on hand to help broker a deal.

"There's no question it's an uphill battle," Kennedy said. "It's difficult but not impossible."

A day after Bush went to Capitol Hill to field criticism from Republicans who derailed the bill, the White House said it would be open to changes to the delicate bipartisan compromise. Architects have argued their so-called "grand bargain" could collapse under the weight of poison-pill amendments.

"You may have a carefully crafted compromise, but on the other hand, you have members of both parties who want to have their say and have their input," White House press secretary Tony Snow said.

Snow also signaled support for the idea of pumping additional money into border security, which he said was worth pursuing, and played down the bitter divisions among Republicans on the issue. "This is not an internal 'fight,'" he said, and added that Bush "considers fellow Republicans friends and colleagues."

Republicans have coalesced behind the idea of assuring a funding stream for border security and workplace enforcement. Georgia Republican Sens. Saxby Chambliss ([news](#), [bio](#), [voting record](#)) and Johnny Isakson ([news](#), [bio](#), [voting record](#)) want a separate emergency spending bill that could total as much as \$15 billion to pay for such measures.

Additional funds for border and workplace crackdowns could persuade the Georgians to back the effort to resurrect the immigration bill, Chambliss said.

"We're thinking about it," he told reporters.