

U.S. Seeks to Curb Illegal Immigration

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WASHINGTON — The Bush administration is planning new efforts to curb illegal immigration by raising fines and speeding up deployment of border agents after failing to push through legislation earlier this year.

The proposals would raise civil fines on employers who hire undocumented immigrants by as much as 25 percent and overhaul temporary worker programs, according to a summary of the plans obtained by The Associated Press.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez planned to announce the changes in a news conference Friday.

A DHS spokesman on Thursday declined to comment because the announcement had not been made. The Commerce Department also declined comment.

The administration also wants to expand the list of international gangs whose members are automatically denied admission to the U.S., reduce processing times for immigrant background checks, and install by the end of the year an exit system so the departure of foreigners from the country can be recorded at airports and seaports.

In addition, employers will face possible criminal sanctions if they don't fire employees unable to clear up problems with their Social Security numbers.

The Homeland Security Department will ask states to voluntarily share their driver's license photos and records with the agency for use in an employment verification system. The sharing is meant to help employers detect fraudulent licenses, according to the summary, which was provided by a congressional aide.

Some of the initiatives are similar to proposals contained in the recent immigration measure which failed to pass in the Senate, though they are not nearly as sweeping.

The legislation was opposed by many conservatives who complained that people don't trust their government to start new immigration programs since existing immigration laws are not enforced.

The Senate bill would have allowed millions of illegal immigrants to obtain legal status and eventually apply for legal residency. It also would have created a guest worker program and stepped up border security.

Some lawmakers have kept up efforts to tighten the border. Last month, the Senate added \$3 billion to a homeland security bill and devoted the money to U.S.-Mexico border

security.

Chertoff alluded to the new enforcement tactics in a speech this week in Boston, calling it "tool sharpening."

"We shouldn't have a patchwork of laws. We should be doing a comprehensive federal solution, but we haven't got that thing done," Chertoff said. "What I can tell you is we will certainly use every enforcement tool that we have, and every resource that we have available, to tackle the problem."