

Immigration Legislation Draws Many Amendments as It Heads to Floor

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But even as they begin a floor fight that is likely to last until the Fourth of July recess, senators from both parties are readying dozens more amendments in an effort to shape the most significant overhaul of the nation's immigration laws in a generation. Though amendments will continue to roll in during the debate, below are some of the more complicated, controversial and important provisions expected to be offered — including some considered to be “poison pills.”

“RESULTS” Senator John Cornyn, Republican of Texas, has signaled that he plans to introduce a measure that would require several border security triggers — including a 90 percent apprehension rate of illegal crossings — to be met before undocumented immigrants could transition to lawful permanent residence, or green card, status. His amendment also would require putting into place a biometric exit system and a nationwide electronic-verification system, to ensure employers are not hiring workers who are in the country illegally.

Democratic senators in the bipartisan group of eight that drafted the legislation, as well as immigration advocates, seized on the provisions as logistically unfeasible hurdles that could delay indefinitely a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants already in the country. Speaking Sunday on Univision, Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the majority leader, warned that Mr. Cornyn's amendment was “a poison pill.”

Speaking on the Senate floor Monday, Mr. Cornyn said, “The true poison pill would be the failure to take sensible measures by adopting measures like mine which are designed to solve the problem.”

“TRUST BUT VERIFY” Senator Rand Paul, Republican of Kentucky, intends to offer an amendment that would require Congress to write and enforce a border security plan, rather than delegating that responsibility to the Department of Homeland Security. In addition, as Mr. Paul explained in an e-mail statement, his provision “requires Congress to vote every year on border security” for the first five years after the legislation takes effect.

“If Congress votes that the border is not secure, elements of immigration reform will cease to go forward and visa programs will be slowed,” he said.

Immigration advocates and many Democratic senators, however, argue that requiring Congress to vote every year would create an inherently partisan process that could derail the path to citizenship.

“That’s extremely problematic,” said Marielena Hincapié, the executive director of the National Immigration Law Center. “You’re leaving it up to chance whether or not a future Congress wants immigration reform.”

EARNED-INCOME TAX CREDIT When the Judiciary Committee debated the legislation last month, Senator Jeff Sessions, Republican of Alabama, offered several provisions that would have blocked millions of immigrants from receiving certain tax credits. One amendment would have required families to provide a valid [Social Security](#) number — for each qualifying child as well as for the filing parent — in order to receive a child tax credit, and another would have denied the earned-income tax credit to immigrants while they had temporary legal status.

Both amendments failed in committee on a party-line vote, but Mr. Sessions — or a fellow Republican — is expected to offer them on the floor.

BACK TAXES Senator Orrin G. Hatch, Republican of Utah, is expected to offer an amendment that would require immigrants to prove they have paid back taxes and are staying current with them as they proceed toward legal status, and another that would create a five-year ban for immigrants who are legal permanent residents before they can receive Affordable Care Act subsidies, both of which are viewed as controversial.

Members of the bipartisan group who wrote the bill worked with Mr. Hatch to amend the bill in committee to address his concerns involving the high-tech industry and visas for high-skilled immigrants, and they hope to work out a similar compromise on the Senate floor.

GUN AMENDMENTS Senator Richard Blumenthal, Democrat of Connecticut, is considering offering two amendments that would restrict access to guns for undocumented immigrants. One of his provisions would close a loophole that allows certain immigrants, including those who entered the country through the Visa Waiver Program, to buy firearms. The other would require the attorney general to alert the secretary of homeland security when an unauthorized immigrant or visitor on a temporary visa tries to buy a firearm, something they cannot do legally.

Mr. Blumenthal said he is still discussing with his Democratic colleagues whether, and how, he should proceed.

“The priority is immigration reform and I think gun violence prevention issues belong in the debate about immigration reform, but I would not press them if the result is to doom immigration reform,” he said.

SAME-SEX PARTNERS Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont and the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, is considering filing an amendment that would add protections for same-sex couples — a provision that he ultimately declined to offer in committee, “with a heavy heart,” he said.

Mr. Leahy’s amendment would allow United States citizens who are in state-recognized marriages to apply for a green card on behalf of their same-sex partners, something citizens in traditional marriages can do relatively easily.

Though many gay rights advocates are hoping Mr. Leahy will offer his amendment on the Senate floor, Republicans — including members of the bipartisan group that wrote the bill — have said that it would be a deal-breaker that would cause them to abandon the entire overhaul.

BORDER FENCE AND SECURITY Senator Marco Rubio, Republican of Florida, has said that he does not think he can support the current legislation, which he helped draft, unless border security provisions are strengthened. To that end, Mr. Rubio and Senator Tom Coburn, Republican of Oklahoma, are considering offering an amendment in which Congress would take over from the Department of Homeland Security the responsibility for drafting a border security plan, which the department would then carry out.

Several of the bill's authors — including Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, and Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York — showed early signs of support for Mr. Rubio's plan. Mr. Schumer said he was willing to strengthen border security provisions as long as any trigger is "both achievable and specific."

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