

Immigration reform impasse deepens between labor, business

Posted by David Nakamura on March 22, 2013 at 11:20 pm

Business and labor leaders accused one another of putting a comprehensive immigration overhaul in the Senate at risk late Friday, as the two sides remained at an impasse over terms of a new visa program for foreign workers.

A bipartisan Senate group appeared unable to negotiate a compromise as the senators prepared to leave Washington for a two-week Easter break. The group has said it hopes to unveil a comprehensive reform bill that would include a path to citizenship for the nation's 11 million illegal immigrants shortly after the Senate resumes work April 8.

But the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO remained at loggerheads over wages for foreigners who are granted visas for low-skilled jobs. Both sides agreed to a plan that would offer up to 200,000 visas to foreign workers in jobs where companies are unable to find enough Americans to do the work.

The Senate draft bill proposes a complicated pay scale based on median wages in industries and regional markets, but [the labor union is asking the senators to offer the workers a higher pay scale](#) than the chamber is willing to accept.

Chamber vice president Randel Johnson, the business organization's lead negotiator, in a statement said that the "unions have jeopardized the entire immigration reform effort ... because of their refusal to take a responsible stance on a small temporary worker program."

But Jeff Hauser, a spokesman for the AFL-CIO, said that the union remains committed to supporting immigration reform and a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

"The coalition of immigrants and union members that elected President Obama did not do so in order to create a new kind of worker visa program but in order to stop the crisis of deportations wrecking communities across the country," Hauser said. "There is no moral or political logic behind greedy elements of the business community thinking that they can hijack immigrant activism in order to further reduce the wages of housekeepers and gardeners, and so their temper tantrum this week will ultimately fail."

Senate aides said they did not expect the impasse to derail the effort to produce a bipartisan bill that could serve as a template for a deal between Congress and the White House. Although the senators are leaving Washington, aides will remain to work on a written draft of the legislation over the next two weeks.

In 2007, an attempted immigration overhaul failed in the Senate in part after senators approved by one vote a plan to eliminate a new guest worker program after five years, angering the business community and many Republicans.

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