

Immigration Overhaul Still a Priority of Senate Democratic Leaders

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By Seth Stern, CQ Staff

Senate Democratic leaders say they intend to press ahead with an immigration overhaul bill despite waning enthusiasm for the measure among many in their caucus.

"It is something we're committed to do," Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., told reporters on Thursday. "And we'll do it as soon as we can."

Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security, who is leading the effort to draft a bill, said, "We are making good progress."

"I've said all along, even before last Tuesday with the Massachusetts election, that we have to have this bill be a bipartisan bill, two Democrats, two Republicans to introduce it," Schumer said, referring to his personal criteria for cosponsorship.

"We're not there yet. We're still working on getting our Republicans."

The only Republican openly willing to collaborate so far is Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who has said whether the bill advances could depend on "how much risk aversion" Scott P. Brown's Senate victory in Massachusetts creates among the chamber's Democrats.

President Obama urged Congress to take up an immigration bill this year in his State of the Union address on Wednesday.

While proponents of a comprehensive overhaul argue it is the kind of bipartisan issue that could benefit Democrats in the November midterm election, many Democratic senators have made clear they would prefer if the issue not come up at all this year

"I want to focus on the economy," Ben Nelson, D-Neb., said earlier this week.

Schumer said he continues to meet “with all different kinds of groups” regarding immigration, including a session Wednesday with former CNN anchor Lou Dobbs, a past advocate of tough immigration controls.

Kathleen Hunter contributed to this story.