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IMMIGRATION BILL GETS MIXED REVIEW

By Sara Murray and Miriam Jordan
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WASHINGTON—As a group of U.S. senators released full details of a bill to overhaul immigration, outside groups quickly launched efforts to tweak it in their favor—or to derail it entirely.

The eight lawmakers made their proposals public Wednesday morning, officially kicking off the broadest push to overhaul immigration laws since a failed effort in 2007. Negotiations stretched into Tuesday evening, as lawmakers hashed out details of visa programs for farm workers and other low-wage workers, along with other issues.

The bill lays out plans to spend at least \$4.5 billion more on border security and to legalize some 11 million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S., but the authors made it clear some provisions may be altered.

"I guarantee you that today, 20 people will call up as they look at the language and say, 'What about this, what about that, I'd rather have this, I'd rather have that,' " said New York Sen. Charles Schumer, a Democratic member of the group. "We're open to some changes."

Many groups—high-tech organizations, farmworker groups, large companies and immigration advocates—applauded the bill before offering their wish lists of ways to change it.

Meanwhile, groups hoping to limit immigration vowed to intensify their efforts. The Federation for American Immigration Reform, a national group that plans a campaign to fight the bill, set up a talk-show blitz in Washington, with roughly 40 radio hosts interviewing politicians, law-enforcement officials and others opposed to the plans.

Roy Beck, executive director of Numbers USA, another organization favoring tough immigration curbs, said he could tap 1.8 million activists to help thwart the plan. "The way this bill's written is perfect for our plan to defeat it," he said. "It is adding more foreign workers at every turn, as if we have a labor shortage."

Immigration advocates raised alarms about a provision that requires beefed-up border security and employment verification before steps to legalize undocumented immigrants can kick in.

"We are very concerned that this proposal has security triggers that create an obstacle to citizenship for our families," said Cristina Jimenez, managing director of United We Dream, the largest organization representing undocumented youth. "We have to make sure the pathway is clear," she said.

The legislation sets goals for the Department of Homeland Security to be able to monitor comings and goings across the entire southern border and to apprehend or turn back 90% of people trying to cross illegally. Before undocumented immigrants are allowed to obtain

green cards, a plan to reach those goals has to be “substantially deployed and substantially operational,” the bill says. It doesn’t require the plan to be fully implemented, meaning there is no process to ensure the security goals are ever met.

“The triggers are based on developing plans and spending money, not on reaching that effectiveness, which is really quite clever,” said Frank Sharry, executive director of advocacy group America’s Voice. “On the other hand, when you’ve got that kind of money and that kind of political pressure, they’re going to really try to reach those.”

Few groups have been more critical than the construction sector. Geoff Burr, vice president of federal affairs for the Associated Builders and Contractors cheered the Senate progress, but said a plan for low-wage workers allocated too few construction visas. “We like this program so much that we are deeply disappointed we won’t be able to use much of it at all,” he said.

Amid supporters’ complaints about the legislation’s finer points and opponents’ promises to block the bill, there was also celebration Wednesday as immigration advocates hailed what they see as the start of an historic push to rewrite immigration laws.

On Wednesday, hundreds of evangelical pastors converged on Washington to lobby Republicans whose votes will be crucial to the passage of any bill.

At a church service held near the Capitol, evangelical leaders invoked Bible passages to make the case for an immigration plan, and stressed that the rollout of a bipartisan Senate bill was just the beginning.

“We have to keep pulling it across the finish line,” said Richard Land, an influential leader of the Southern Baptist Convention.