

Immigration: Kyl Rejects Schumer Offer to Help Draft Immigration Bill

By Chris Strohm and Dan Friedman

Senate Minority Whip Kyl on Tuesday shot down an offer from Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., to help develop a bipartisan bill that would try to beef up border security and stop the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States.

Schumer, who has been trying to forge an immigration bill with Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., opened the door to negotiating with Kyl and Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., over inclusion of tough border security measures.

On Monday, Kyl and McCain unveiled a 10-point plan to increase security along the border with Mexico, including the deployment of 3,000 National Guard troops and more unmanned aircraft to conduct round-the-clock patrols.

"We believe our blueprint is even stronger than the Arizona senators' proposal in stopping the flow of illegal immigrants, because our plan both increases border security and prevents employers from hiring illegal immigrants," Schumer said in a statement Tuesday.

"We would certainly be open to negotiating a comprehensive bill that requires completion of border security measures before any other measures take effect. We welcome the Arizona senators to the negotiating table to work on passing such a bill this year."

It was unclear if Schumer reached out to Kyl and McCain personally.

Regardless, Kyl said in an interview he is not interested in negotiating a comprehensive bill because the Obama administration has not fully enforced existing border security and immigration laws.

"Trust but verify," Kyl said. "I'm not doing anything anymore until I see the action; not just the promise."

But key players appear to be lining up to make immigration reform the next major bill pushed after financial regulatory reform, even though skeptics question if legislation can pass this year.

House Speaker Pelosi at a regular congressional leadership meeting Tuesday indicated that if she had to choose between immigration reform and energy legislation moving first, she would prefer immigration, according to an aide.

A spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Reid said the schedule for a bill depends on when Schumer schedules a markup but reiterated that Reid intends to move a bill this year.

Meanwhile, President Obama raised the issue of passing immigration reform this year in a call Tuesday with Sen. Scott Brown, R-Mass., a spokeswoman for Brown said.

Brown told Obama that he would review any legislation if it came before the Senate, but he believes Congress should focus on fixing the economy and creating jobs, she said.

Kyl said he did not see any support inside the Senate Republican Conference for passing an immigration reform measure this year.

"I think it's a problem because we haven't secured the border; we're not enforcing the law yet; we're not doing the things that everybody agreed was kind of the precondition or the foundation for comprehensive reform in the future," Kyl said.

"Secondly, you've got a huge change in circumstances at the border with all the new violence down there," he added.

He also said he does not believe a consensus exists for the immigration bill he helped write three years ago with Brown's predecessor, the late Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass.

"My Democratic colleagues don't agree with some of the things that were agreed to by Sen. Kennedy. Until you can rebuild that consensus it would be a mistake to bring that bill up if you want to get it passed," Kyl said.

Advocates who support immigration reform are demanding Schumer and Graham introduce their bill by May 1. They say the administration and congressional Democrats will face repercussions if they do not introduce a bill by then, including mass demonstrations, civil disobedience actions and lack of support at the ballot box in November.