

# WALL STREET JOURNAL

## SENATORS BRACE FOR IMMIGRATION DEBATE

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June 10, 2013

Efforts to secure the border with Mexico will be a central focus as a sweeping overhaul of the nation's immigration laws moves to the Senate floor this week, the start of a marathon month of debate on the bill.

Senators are set to vote Tuesday on a procedural motion to formally bring the bill to the floor, which requires 60 votes to pass and would open debate on a stream of amendments, including many that could split the coalition of senators backing the bill and endanger its chances of passage.

The bill would establish a procedure for many of the nation's 11 million illegal immigrants to gain legal status, ratchet up border security and rework the system of visas for temporary workers from abroad. It is the first broad effort to rewrite immigration laws since 2007.

The bipartisan group of eight senators that crafted the bill is still torn over how much to adjust the legislation to win additional support, particularly from Republicans looking to strengthen requirements for border security. Border security is a particularly sensitive issue, because the legislation sets security benchmarks that must be met before anyone currently in the country illegally can receive green cards and become legal permanent residents.

Among the expected amendments is a border-security plan from Sen. John Cornyn (R., Texas). It would require biometric systems at all land and sea ports to monitor who is exiting from the U.S., a more expensive option than the tracking system now in the bill. It also would call for complete operational control of the U.S. border with Mexico before illegal immigrants can receive green cards, a tougher benchmark than in the current bill, which requires a border-security plan to be "substantially deployed."

If Mr. Cornyn's plan is adopted, "Democrats will start to bail from the bill," said Frank Sharry, executive director for pro-immigration group America's Voice. "That's why it's a poison pill. It's designed to destabilize."

Some Democrats, including Sen. Dick Durbin (D., Ill.), a member of the bipartisan group of eight, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D., Nev.), want to make as few changes as possible during the Senate debate, senior Democratic aides said. They argue that the Republicans will have a chance to alter the bill when the Senate negotiates a final version with the Republican-controlled House.

Other Democrats, including Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York, say the more important goal is to corral as many senators from both parties as possible to back the bill now, in order to build momentum for the House to act, another senior Democratic aide said.

In addition to tougher border-security provisions, Democrats expect Republicans to try to bolster a provision requiring the payment of back taxes by illegal immigrants who are seeking to become legal residents. Lawmakers may also try to expand the list of crimes that would exclude someone from applying for residency, and they may try to tighten the asylum

and refugee systems in the aftermath of the Boston marathon bombings, which were allegedly carried out by the sons of a Chechen man who sought asylum in the U.S.

Last week, House Speaker John Boehner (R., Ohio) said he hoped the House Judiciary Committee would pass a bill or a series of bills by the end of June that could then be brought to the House floor.

On Friday, Sens. Jeff Sessions (R., Ala.) and Mike Lee (R., Utah), immigration-bill critics, offered a preview of the contentious debate that lies ahead. The two spent hours taking turns hammering the bill on an otherwise empty Senate floor after many lawmakers had already left town for the weekend.

"There is no one amendment that can fix this bill," Mr. Lee said. "There is no series of tinkering changes that will turn this mess of a bill into the reform the country needs and that Americans deserve."

Border-security amendments are just one in a number of issues that could upset the fragile balance the immigration bill is relying on in order to secure backing from Democrats, Republicans and such outside interests as labor unions and the business organizations.

"I'm concerned the thing's going to fall apart if we don't watch it. I hope it won't," said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.). "There's many friction lines."