



## Legal status of US workers' an immigration issue

By SUZANNE GAMBOA, Associated Press  
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WASHINGTON — The Senate Democrat leading the push for immigration changes said Tuesday verifying the legal status of workers will require citizens and immigrants to prove they are legally eligible to hold jobs in the U.S.

Sen. Charles Schumer, chairman of the immigration subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said he envisions a workforce verification system that relies on an electronic identifier, known as biometrics, such as fingerprints.

"In order to completely prevent future waves of illegal immigration, we must recognize that no matter what we do on the border and at our ports of entry, jobs are what draw illegal immigrants to the United States," Schumer said.

Congress is preparing to start debating immigration changes again, likely by fall. Previously, the idea of toughening how employers make sure they are hiring legal workers has met with resistance.

But Schumer said the debate has evolved.

"The biggest difference is people know it's essential," said Schumer, D-N.Y. "So much so, the left and the right are willing to make compromises. Previously this was done more grudgingly, more half-heartedly. Schumer said that enforcement must be accompanied by legalization and a temporary worker program.

Expansion and improvement of the E-Verify system has helped move the issue forward. About 136,000 employers use it and some states require it. Also, President Barack Obama has made employer enforcement central to his immigration overhaul agenda.

But the system has a large flaw. It can't detect when people use stolen or borrowed identities. Immigration officials have added photos of legal permanent residents and are adding passport photos, but not all Americans have passports.

About 5 percent of the workforce is considered to be undocumented, either illegal immigrants or foreigners ineligible to work in the U.S., such as some students.

Most employers still use the paper-based system for new hires, known as the I-9 system, but it's been easily exploited with fraudulent documents that are either not caught or in some cases ignored by employers.

The drawbacks are the reason Schumer is backing a biometric solution and why the Migration Policy Institute this week recommended Congress strengthen the E-Verify system, but also require the administration to test other ways to verify the legal status of workers.

Not everyone is on board with Schumer's proposal.

The American Civil Liberties Union urged Senators to reject any worker verification plan, including one based on biometrics saying it invades Americans privacy and will lead to people being blacklisted from jobs. Employers want to be assured they will not be held liable if they wrongly fire someone who doesn't check out and they don't want to bear all the cost of a high-tech system, readers for any sort of scannable card containing biometrics for example.

Others believe strengthening the E-Verify system is the way to go.

"We got people on the left who don't want a card. We got people on the right who don't want a card," said Sen. Jeff Sessions, ranking Republican on the Judiciary Committee. "Count me a skeptic."