



Wednesday, June 7, 2006

Site Tools

- [Advertise with us](#)
- [Web site feedback](#)
- [Make TBO.com my](#)

[homepage](#) **Email**

Print

RSS Feeds:

- [Feed for this channel](#)
- [All feeds/RSS FAQ](#)

Most Popular News:

- [Gay Political Activists Target Storms' Bid For State Senate](#)
- [2 Bodies Found Under Helium Balloon In Lutz](#)
- [Beastly Date](#)
- [Baby A Surprise But 'More Than Welcome'](#)
- [Governor Choices Stump Democrats](#)
- [More Headlines](#)

[TBO.com](#) > [News](#) > [Metro](#)

Reaching Deal On Immigration Will Be Tough

By **MICHAEL FECHTER** The Tampa Tribune

Published: Jun 7, 2006

One bill opens the door for illegal immigrants to stay in the country and perhaps someday become citizens. The other bill automatically makes them felons and could lead to prosecution against Americans who knowingly offer them assistance.

The U.S. House and Senate have approached immigration reform from starkly different angles, with different priorities. Whether they can find common ground to make law will depend in large part on who gets tapped for a conference committee and whether they heed President Bush's lobbying.

Bush tried to emphasize what the two bills have in common during a speech Tuesday to Border Patrol recruits in New Mexico. Enhanced border security that catches immigrants trying to sneak into the country is a shared objective, he said. So is the need to punish employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

When it came to differences, though, the president clearly sided with the Senate's approach, favoring a path to citizenship for those who have been in the country for some time.

Hard-line House members consider any provision that allows illegal immigrants to stay in the country and continue working to be a form of amnesty and have refused to consider such measures.

The president is going to have to work behind the scenes to force a compromise, U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez, R-Orlando, said in a recent appearance in Tampa. Bush's involvement could be vital to any chance of success in a conference committee, said Martinez, who helped forge a Senate compromise on its bill and who hopes to be among the Senate's conferees.

"I'd look to see if he calls in the House members and the House leadership" to tell them to get it done, Martinez said.

ADVERTISEMENT

Find out how you can get gas for \$1.99/gallon with the GM Fuel Price Protection Program.

2006 Chevy Impala

>> [Click here for complete restrictions and details.](#)**More from this channel:**

- [Road Measures Target Danger](#)
- [Reaching Deal On Immigration Will Be Tough](#)
- [Language Barrier Raises Storm Risk](#)
- [County Garbage Fee Bump Expected](#)
- [Tattooers Make Mark With 666](#)

Search for more information:

Site Search

[TBO.com Site Search](#) | [Tribune archive from 1990](#)

Bush Upholds 'Tradition'

Bush took to the road instead Tuesday, saying there was progress toward a comprehensive reform bill. He said he opposes amnesty, which he equated to an automatic grant of citizenship for illegal immigrants.

"But we've got to recognize that there are people who have been here for years, and they've got a home and a clean record, and they've been paying taxes," he said. "And so I believe if they want to stay here, that they ought to pay a fine, first and foremost. They've broken our law, and they ought to pay a fine for breaking the law.

"The United States is a nation of laws, and we're going to enforce our laws," Bush said. "We're also a nation of immigrants, and we're going to uphold that tradition. And these are not contradictory goals. America can be a lawful society, and America will be a welcoming society at the same time."

The House stand has not addressed any similar sentiment.

Once the meetings start, Martinez said he hopes both sides tone down their rhetoric and work toward an acceptable compromise. The House and Senate could start by bridging the relatively smaller gaps between the bills' security issues, he said, including a fence along the Mexican border to stem the tide of illegal immigrants sneaking into the country.

If the impasse holds, voters may look only toward Republicans for the failure to pass a bill, Martinez said.

Immigration reform is among the most significant domestic issues, Martinez said. With Republicans controlling both houses of Congress and the White House, there is no excuse for failing to pass a bill.

"We can't take a pass. We have to respond, and we have to lead," he said.

That sentiment was echoed last week by White House spokesman Tony Snow.

Members of Congress will "pay a heavier political price for failing to act than for acting," Snow said.

Enforcement Comes 1st

The president's decision to send National Guard troops to patrol the Mexican borders is a sign immigration reform is a priority and that "we want enforcement first," Snow said.

The first troops deployed to the border started work Monday. House members who may not like all of the provisions in the Senate bill should accept that as a first step in a broader reform package, Snow said.

"Do you really want to say to your constituents, 'You know, I'm going to wait a couple of years before I take up the issue of people knowingly hiring illegal aliens; I want to wait a couple years before I go ahead and try to identify who the illegal aliens are; I want to wait a couple of years before I start grappling with what to do with these 11 million or 12 million people who are here illegally?'"

Balancing Security, Justice

Immigration reform usually involves a balance between national security and concern for social justice, said Shawn Parry-Giles, director of the University of Maryland's Center for Political Communication and Civic Leadership.

During the early days of the Cold War, legal and illegal immigrants were deported to Mexico in the name of security. During the 1960s, President Johnson supported legislation that increased the flow of immigrants into the country, she said.

"In times of perceived threat, particularly during wartime, security concerns usually trump notions of civil rights and justice," Parry-Giles wrote in an e-mail to the Tribune.

Officials need to be mindful of pushing too hard on punishment, she said, because it could prompt a backlash among Latin American voters courted by both parties.

Time Running Out

Once named, the conference committee members have a limited amount of time to act, said Bob Graham, former Democratic senator from Florida. Congress takes a break for the Independence Day holiday and then takes off all of August as members gear up for the fall elections.

Graham said that during his time in Washington he found public support for agricultural workers and thinks the public would accept legislation that allows immigrants to stay as guest workers or pursue permanent residency as long as they meet new requirements.

"There's a certain understanding and sympathy for farmworkers," the Democrat said. "If all the undocumented migrant workers were deported, you wouldn't have eaten your strawberries for breakfast this morning."

Any bill that passes will be controversial, Graham said.

Martinez seems to agree.

"There's going to be 50 or 60 votes we're never going to get in the House," Martinez said, noting that Colorado Republican Rep. Tom Tancredo leads an alliance of House members vehemently opposed to an

change that allows illegal immigrants to stay in the country. "We can get a very substantial immigration bill done without the Tancredo wing."

Contact Michael Fechter at (813) 259-7621 or mfechter @tampatrib.com.

[Write a letter to the editor](#) | [Subscribe and get two weeks free](#) | [Place an Ad Online](#)

T B O . C O M A D L I N K S

[Home Equity Rates: 6.84%](#)

Citibank Home Equity Loan rates as low as 6.84% APR fixed for LIFE!

www.myhomeequity.com

[Decks and Patios](#)

Get free quotes from the best local deck and patio builders.

<http://www.renovationexperts.com/>

[Buy a link here](#)

TBO.com - *Live in the moment* ©2006 Media General Inc. All Rights Reserved | [Member Agreement](#) | [Privacy Statement](#) | [Work With Us](#)

TBO.com: [Feedback](#) | [Advertise With Us](#) | [Email Alerts](#) | [Make Us Your Home Page](#) | [Member Center](#) | [Contact Us](#)

WFLA: See news developing? [Email](#) or call our Tipline at 1-800-348-WFLA | [8 on Your Side](#) | [8's Army](#) | [Links We Mentioned](#)

The Tampa Tribune: [Subscribe](#) | [Place an Ad](#) | [Electronic Edition](#) | [Photo Reprints](#) | [Public Research](#) | [Archive](#) | [Corrections](#)
