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Bush to press immigration reform in televised speech



AFP/File Photo: A Minuteman Project volunteer inspects the horizon for any illegal immigrant crossing activity in an...

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WASHINGTON (AFP) - [President George W. Bush](#) will address Americans on the heated immigration debate in a televised speech in which he is expected to announce the deployment of National Guard troops to the border with Mexico to stop illegal immigrants.

Bush will speak from the Oval Office in the White House as the Senate resumes debate on legislation that could lead to legalization of at least part of the estimated 11.5 million undocumented workers in the United States.

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Bush will reportedly use the 8:00 pm (0000 GMT) speech to announce the deployment of National Guard forces to the border, a measure approved on Thursday in the House of Representatives as a way to halt the smuggling of drugs and people.

Mexican President [Vicente Fox](#) telephoned Bush on Sunday to express concern about the plan, but Bush insisted that he would not militarize the border, a White House spokeswoman said.

The US leader "made clear that the United States considers Mexico a friend and that what is being considered is not a militarization of the border but support of border patrol capabilities on a temporary basis," said spokeswoman Maria Tamburri.

The two leaders also talked about border security cooperation "and reaffirmed the shared responsibility between the two countries to secure the border," said Tamburri.

"The president reiterated to president Fox his commitment to comprehensive immigration reform" during the roughly 15-minute conversation, she said.

Meanwhile, national security adviser [Stephen Hadley](#) made clear, in a CNN interview Sunday, that while Bush was not opposed to the idea of eventual citizenship for temporary workers, "they will have to go to the back of the line, not at the front of the line."

Immigration has shot to the top of the US agenda in this election year as Republicans seek to retain control of both chambers of Congress in the November polls against opposition Democrats.

Hundreds of thousands of mainly Hispanic immigrants and their supporters have held huge demonstrations across the United States recently against proposed laws to crack down on

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The immigration debate has divided Republicans ahead of the mid-term legislative elections, as some call for the creation of a guest-worker program while others want tougher laws.

Bush's possible deployment of troops could help settle differences among his fellow Republicans.

"Congressional Republicans who back Bush's call for a guest-worker program and a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants say (the deployment) is precisely what they need to win over House conservatives," the Washington Post said Saturday.

But the latest opinion poll by Newsweek magazine showed Americans are dissatisfied with the status quo on immigration.

When asked how Bush handles immigration policy, only 25 percent of those surveyed approved while 61 percent did not approve.

The differences between what the Senate means by "immigration reform" and what was passed in December by the House of Representatives highlights the strong differences within the Republican Party.

Under the leadership of Tom Tancredo of Colorado and James Sensenbrenner of Wisconsin, the House approved a law that would make unapproved entry to the United States a crime punishable with jail time.

The bill also calls for the construction of a wall along about one-third of the 3,000-kilometer (2,000-mile) border with Mexico.

Left out of the House bill, however, was Bush's guest-worker program, which would allow foreigners into the United States to fill temporary jobs, such as picking agricultural crops.

The Senate bill, on the other hand, would open the possibility of legal residency and citizenship to most of those in the United States without papers, under the bipartisan sponsorship of Democrat Ted Kennedy and Republican John McCain.

Once approved by their respective chambers, a conference committee of senators and representatives will hammer out a compromise version -- which will then need a final vote by both houses in a form that Bush will sign.

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