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Senate defeats bid to water down immigration bill

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By Donna Smith

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Senate on Tuesday blocked efforts to water down a sweeping immigration bill coupling tougher border controls with a guest worker program similar to proposals spelled out by President George W. Bush.

The bill's backers said they were encouraged about its prospects. But they said it faced an uncertain future in eventual negotiations with the House of Representatives, which earlier passed a tough bill that would turn illegal immigrants into felons and erect a big border fence.

"The signals we are getting are very good," said Sen. Ken Salazar, a Colorado Democrat.

The Senate bill includes border security and enforcement measures but adds a guest worker program and a pathway to citizenship for some of the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants.

In a 69-28 procedural vote, the Senate killed an amendment proposed by Sen. Byron Dorgan, a North Dakota Democrat, that would have eliminated the guest worker program for future immigrants. It would have limited the program to illegal immigrants who have lived in America for at least two years.

The Senate also rejected a measure offered by Sen. Johnny Isakson that would have required the Department of Homeland Security to certify that U.S. borders were sealed and secure before the guest worker program could go forward.

Opponents said the measure from the Georgia Republican would have gutted the bill. "If there were ever a killer amendment, it was the Isakson amendment," said Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid of Nevada. He urged Bush to do more to line up support among Republicans.

But the Senate did agree to cap the number of temporary worker visas that would be available under the guest worker program to 200,000 a year, instead of a proposed 325,000. [Continued...](#)

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