

## Border-fence bill on agenda

### *Senate under pressure to pass some kind of reform before election*

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Since Congress returned from the August recess, the House of Representatives has passed a flurry of bills dealing with immigration reform.

The Senate is expected to decide this week how to proceed on at least one of these bills - one that would authorize the construction of a 700-mile long fence between the U.S. and Mexican borders.

None of the bills deal with the question of guest workers or offer a pathway to citizenship, as was included in the comprehensive package passed by the Senate in May and supported by President Bush. Nonetheless, Bush has indicated that he would sign the fence bill if it makes it his desk.

"I would view this as an interim step," he said in an interview with CNN on Wednesday. "I don't view this as the final product. And I will keep urging people to have a comprehensive reform."

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., says he also wants more comprehensive reform, though he does not support the idea of offering a way to citizenship for some undocumented immigrants already living and working in the U.S. He voted against the immigration reform bill in May.

"This (a fence) is a piece of the border-security debate, but I think it falls short at the end of the day of what we need," he said.

Burr had co-sponsored legislation earlier this year that would have allowed some illegal immigrants to get on a pathway to citizenship provided they left the country first. Because Congress is expected to leave for the election recess at the end of the week, that bill is dead for the year. The Senate bill that passed did not require most illegal immigrants to leave the country.

Advocates say that the fence bill is necessary to stop the flow of illegal immigrants from crossing the border.

Other bills passed by the House include requiring photo identification to vote, prohibiting the construction of tunnels along the border and replacing the so-called "catch-and-release" policy toward illegal immigrants with a "catch-and-return" policy.

These "bills will help secure our borders through a multi-faceted approach and, when combined, will make it increasingly difficult to cross the border illegally," said Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-5th, in a statement Thursday.

But others think that a fence will do little to stop border crossings.

"This is not a substitute for serious, comprehensive (reform) on immigration because it essentially treats a symptom, rather than a cause," said Jon Amastae, the director of the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso.

The big problem, said Amastae and other analysts, is the fact that the American labor market offers countless opportunities, and the Mexican economy is nowhere near as strong.

"You need to look at the source of the problem. (There) is an overwhelming supply of willing laborers on the Mexican side of the border because of the economic challenges in Mexico," said David Shirk, the director of the Trans-Border Institute at the University of San Diego.

"Fences will definitely make it much more difficult and more dangerous to cross the border, but it will not likely reduce the number of undocumented immigrants," he said, noting that many immigrants come to the United States legally and then overstay their visas.

Both men advocated greater American investment in Mexico, which they said in the long run would cost far less than border security, tunnels, fences and other related components of the House-passed bills.

Polls indicate that immigration is not a top issue for most Americans, said academics and pollsters. However, among voters who see immigration as a top issue, House and Senate action on border security is likely to help Republicans, experts said.

Jon McHenry, a Republican pollster, said that the bill helps Republicans take a step toward showing that they are capable of moving on immigration reform before the election.

"I think there was more support for a more comprehensive approach, but they have to show that they have done something on immigration," he said.

The bills coming from the House probably please the Republican's base voters, said John Dinan, a professor of political science at Wake Forest University. That will help come Election Day because mid-term elections, more so than presidential elections, are won and lost on turnout, he said. "Those who would have stayed home on election day are the ones who wanted border security, so for the voters who care about this, they are ecstatic," Dinan said.

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