

Specter sees difficult road for an alien citizenship bill

Senate set to begin floor debate at end of month

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Stephen Dinan and Jerry Seper, THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Arlen Specter, kicking off the year's immigration debate yesterday, said a bill to grant citizenship to illegal aliens probably cannot pass the Congress.

"I wouldn't have any objection to [a bill]," the Pennsylvania Republican said. "But I think the political reality is that's going to be very difficult to do and to get a bill." Mr. Specter is racing to produce an immigration bill out of his committee before the end of the month, when the Senate is scheduled to begin a floor debate on the issue. His proposal would allow new foreign workers temporary entry and would let current illegal aliens work legally and indefinitely - though it would not create a path to citizenship.

The committee will begin voting next week, and Republican senators indicate they will offer amendments to end birthright citizenship for those born to illegal aliens in the United States and to build more fence along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Senators are expected to offer other guest-worker proposals, including a version by Sens. John McCain, Arizona Republican, and Edward M. Kennedy, Massachusetts Democrat, that would create a 400,000-a-year worker program that would offer a path to citizenship for them and for most current illegal aliens.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republican and a supporter of the McCain-Kennedy bill, said those calling for illegal aliens to go home need to grow up.

"America needs to mature on this issue, and they need to understand we've got a lot of people here for the right reason," he said. Mr. Graham said illegal aliens contribute to the economy and take difficult jobs such as landscaping, and he noted that as a golfer he probably benefits from their labor.

That infuriated one observer, Peter Gadiel, a co-founder of 9/11 Families for a Secure America, whose son died in the attack on the World Trade Center.

"I would have thought that a senator of the United States would consider the lives of the 3,000 people lost on 9/11 and the lives lost every day to crimes committed by illegal aliens would be worth more than his ... cheaper greens fees," he said. "I think Senator Graham is a disgrace, an absolute disgrace, to make that kind of statement."

Mr. Gadiel promised to campaign against anyone who votes for legalization if someone from that program commits a crime or terrorist attack in the future.

Meanwhile in the House, Zapata County Sheriff Sigifredo Gonzalez Jr., head of the Texas Border Sheriffs Coalition, told a Judiciary Committee panel that all 16 sheriffs in the group think terrorists have "an interest and a desire" to exploit existing vulnerabilities

on the nation's border.

El Paso County Sheriff Leo Samaniego said drug and human smugglers expose a hole in national security.

"If illicit organizations can bring in tons of narcotics through this region and work a distribution network that spans the entire country, then they can bring in the resources for terrorism as well," he said. "If illegal aliens can be smuggled through here in truck loads - and they are - then terrorist organizations can also covertly smuggle the people to carry out their plans."

Sheriff Gonzalez also said drug cartels have shown they are willing to fight to protect their drug loads and are a threat to U.S. law enforcement.

"They are able to monitor our office, home and cellular phone conversations," he said. "We recently received information that the cartels immediately across our border are planning on killing as many police officers as possible on the U.S. side. This is being planned for the purpose of attempting to 'scare us' away from the border."

