



Latest House immigration bill: here's what you need to know about what will be voted on Wednesday

Erin Kelly

June 26, 2018

WASHINGTON – House Republican leaders were scrambling Tuesday to add last-minute changes to try to attract more support for an immigration bill scheduled to come to a vote Wednesday.

Among the updates: the creation of a new visa program to bring in migrant farm workers to rural districts and a provision to require American companies to use an electronic system to verify that workers can be legally employed.

Here's a look at highlights of the latest bill, which is called the Border Security and Immigration Reform Act of 2018:

Trump's border wall

The bill provides nearly \$25 billion for the construction of a wall along the U.S. Mexico border – a barrier that President Trump has made the centerpiece of his immigration policy. Trump has said he will not agree to any immigration reform plan that does not include the wall. Democrats oppose the wall as costly, ineffective and unnecessary at a time when overall border crossings are down.

Interior enforcement

The legislation would complete a biometric entry-exit program to help immigration authorities keep track of whether immigrants with temporary visas leave the U.S. when they are supposed to go. The majority of people who are in the U.S. illegally have overstayed their visas rather than slipped across the border.

Relief for "Dreamers"

The bill would allow young immigrants who came here as children to earn legal status that would allow them to work in the U.S. and travel abroad for a period of six years. At the end of that time, the immigrants could apply to renew their legal status for another six years.

Critics say it would be difficult for the so-called "Dreamers" to become citizens under the plan. After six years of legal status, a young immigrant could apply for a green card, which must be obtained before he or she can apply for citizenship. But green cards would not automatically be granted to people who have earned their six-year legal status and followed the rules.

The Cato Institute, a Libertarian think tank, has estimated that eligibility restrictions in the bill would result in only about 12 percent of the estimated 3.6 million "Dreamers" currently in the U.S. earning citizenship.

Farm guest-worker program

The bill would create a new visa program that would allow farmers and ranchers to bring in a legal, stable supply of migrant workers for both seasonal planting and harvesting jobs and year-round work at dairy farms and poultry processing plants. The new program would replace the current visa program, which farmers have complained is expensive and burdensome.

The bill would end "excessive regulatory burdens" – such as requiring employers to provide housing and transportation for migrant workers, according to a summary of the bill by Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee. The workers would not be eligible for any federal benefits, such as health care subsidies.

Mandatory employee verification program

Employers would be required to use a federal electronic database system called E-Verify to make sure that they hire people who are legally eligible to work in the U.S. The use of E-Verify is voluntary for employers in most states now.

Family separation at the border

Children who cross the U.S.-Mexico border with their parents or legal guardians would no longer be separated from their parents when the adults are taken into custody by the Department of Homeland Security for the misdemeanor crime of crossing the border illegally.

The provision would "fix" a court decision, known as the Flores settlement, that requires children to be released from detention after 20 days even when it means being removed from their parents.

The bill allocates increased funding for family detention space to house children with their parents.

Children who cross the border without their parents or legal guardians would be returned to their home countries.

Changes to legal immigration system

The visa system, which currently places a priority on reuniting immigrants with family members already living in the U.S., would be overhauled to favor immigrants who offer job skills that the country needs. Applicants would be given points based on their skills, work experience, education, military service, and English language proficiency.

The border wall would have to be funded before these new visas would become available.

The bill also makes it more difficult for people to be granted asylum in the U.S. by making it harder for them to prove that they have "credible fear" of being killed or harmed if they return to their home countries. Many of the Central Americans crossing the southwest border are fleeing brutal gang violence and murder in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Visa lottery

Because most immigrants to the U.S. come from Latin America and Asia, Congress created a visa lottery program in 1990 that allows about 50,000 immigrants a year from other areas of the world to obtain green cards to increase the diversity of immigrants coming into America. The bill would end that program.