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Vision Latina

By Ryan Stark Lilienthal

Now that the U.S. Senate has passed immigration legislation, the issue of comprehensive immigration reform moves on to the next, bigger hurdle – reconciling the senate proposal with the mean-spirited, enforcement-only bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives last December – (the infamous Sensenbrenner Bill (H.R. 4437)). The reconciliation process of the Senate and House bills will be like two families attempting marry a bride and groom who have nothing in common and are repulsed by each others’ appearance. Needless to say, the chance of a successful marriage between the Senate and House bills is weak; and by the end of the wedding, pro- and anti-immigrant advocates may pray that the marriage fails.

The weeks of intense debate in the U.S. Senate provides a small hint of the struggle positive immigration reform faces when Senate and House leaders attempt to reconcile the Senate and House immigration bills. Since the Senate began debate on immigration legislation, anti-immigrant legislators have made every effort to undermine the initial compromise proposal through harmful amendments.

The initial Senate proposal provided a meaningful path to legalization for the 11-12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, and created a temporary guest worker program to enable foreign nationals to enter the United States legally to do the work that many undocumented immigrants perform. Fortunately, amendments to eliminate the path to

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legalization have, for the most part, failed; but the Senate has agreed to other amendments which will make it much harder undocumented immigrants to qualify for legalization. For example, undocumented immigrants with outstanding removal orders will be barred from legalizing their status.

The amendment process within the Senate has been child's play when compared to the Senate bill's expected reception by the U.S. House of Representatives. Many House members (also known as "Representatives" or "Congressman") promise to kill any immigration bill that provides a path to legalize to undocumented immigrants.

Most recognize that President Bush will have to be a fully engaged match-maker to overcome the enormous obstacles that will prevent the marriage between the Senate and House bills. Immigrants and their advocates must continue to urge their Senators and Representatives to support immigration reform that provides a path to legalization, without compromising the rights of many undocumented immigrants who could be left behind as a result of the Senate's harmful amendments or limitations imposed by anti-immigrant legislators in the House. If making the match between the Senate and House bills means too much compromise, it might be worth waiting until after the November elections when there is a chance that more pro-immigrant legislators will be elected to the Senate and House.