

Immigration bill falters

by UPI

WASHINGTON - Republicans banded together Thursday in the U.S. Senate to vote against closing debate on the compromise immigration bill.

Even Republican senators who have said they plan to vote for the measure joined the majority with enough Democrats so that an attempt to close debate failed 60-33, National Public Radio reported. A 60-vote supermajority is needed to bring a vote.

The bill, backed by U.S. President George Bush, would give many illegal immigrants a path to legitimacy and citizenship.

Early Thursday, the Senate voted 49-48 to amend the bill so that its proposed guest-worker program expires after five years.

On Wednesday, the Senate defeated several amendments that members of either party had proclaimed deal breakers. Amendments were approved that gave the bill a more conservative look.

Senators voted to make English the national language. They also passed amendments that would block new legalized immigrants from receiving earned-income tax credits and block legal workers from receiving Social Security benefits if they overstay their visas.

Before the post-midnight vote on the guest-worker program, Sen. Mel Martinez, R-Fla., who helped craft the bill, said it looked like it would survive a Senate vote.

"It's holding fast," Martinez told the Post. "It's as good as we could hope for right now."

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