

WSTPC 2007 ISSUE PAPER ***IMMIGRATION REFORM***

BACKGROUND: One of the most controversial issues before Congress in years is the question of immigration reform. This has resulted from concern over heavy illegal immigration into the U.S., especially across our southern land borders, resulting in nearly 12 million undocumented persons in the country. In last year's 109th Congress, this was a bitterly contested issue, with the House of Representatives favoring a stricter, more punitive approach, while the Senate (and the President) favored a more comprehensive approach that would have established a path to citizenship for undocumented aliens. Neither approach prevailed and the result was stalemate then and now.

H.R. 1645 is the first major immigration bill in the 110th Congress. This is a bipartisan proposal for comprehensive immigration reform that would allow millions of illegal immigrants to participate in a guest-worker program and possibly gain citizenship. Introduced in the House by Reps. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) and Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL), H.R. 1645 differs dramatically from the measure passed by the House in the 109th Congress, which relied almost solely on tough enforcement action to reduce illegal immigration. The bill would clamp down on illegal border crossings from Mexico, while allowing some illegal workers and their family members already in the U.S. to remain legally for up to six years if they pay a \$1,000 fine for breaking the law and continuously hold a job.

Senate legislation similar to last year's McCain-Kennedy bill is expected to be introduced soon.

IMPORT: Many tourism and hospitality businesses rely on undocumented workers to fill jobs.

STATUS & OUTLOOK: Both House and Senate would like to vote on immigration reform before their Memorial Day recess. Intense bipartisan discussions are underway in both houses, especially the Senate, with top Administration officials participating. Strong support and strong opposition can be found on both sides of the aisle making it difficult for leaders to enforce party discipline. In sum, immigration reform remains intensely controversial, however, and the outlook for passage of significant legislation on this subject is uncertain. If reform legislation is not enacted by September, 2007, it is unlikely to be passed by this Congress.

WSTPC POSITION: The WSTPC has joined the Western Governors Association and most of the tourism and hospitality industry in trying to find a solution for comprehensive immigration reform. The WSTPC supports efforts to find legal avenues for foreign workers to participate in the economy, many of whom provide a vital and stable workforce for the hospitality industry.

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