

Immigration Bill Gaining Steam

The U.S. Senate's Gang of Eight fended off poison-pill amendments, meant to derail a bipartisan immigration reform bill supporters say is gaining steam.

The Senate Judiciary Committee, during a markup session last week, voted down Republican-sponsored amendments that sought to delay putting 11 million illegal immigrants on a path to citizenship and dramatically increase the number of Border Patrol agents and surveillance vehicles, among other things, The Hill reported Friday.

The bill's sponsors also held off an effort U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., a liberal, to halt Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano from deporting undocumented workers to unsafe areas. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., one of the bill's chief authors, said Coons's proposal was so broad that it could stop almost all deportations to Mexico.

The members of the Gang of Eight on the panel -- Schumer and Sens. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.; Lindsey Graham, R-S.C.; and Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., stood firm to defeat amendments that could undermine the bill's bipartisan support.

Schumer said he was encouraged by support from Republicans during the hearing and predicted it would grow, The Hill reported.

"On occasional votes we went beyond just the members of the Gang of Eight who voted for certain things," Schumer said. "In the overall tone I get the sense that even those on the other side of the aisle would like to be able to support something, many of them beyond just Jeff Flake and Lindsey Graham."

The committee defeated measures presented by Republican Sens. Chuck Grassley of Iowa and Ted Cruz of Texas that would have required fully operational border control for six months and a tripling of border patrol agents before granting legal status to 11 million illegal immigrants.

The committee passed an amendment sponsored by Chairman Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, that would give the Department of Homeland Security flexibility to spend \$1.5 billion for fence building along the southern border.

Democrats pointed to the panel's acceptance of eight GOP-sponsored amendments to improve border security and congressional oversight.

"These are good-faith improvements to the bill that make our proposal stronger," Schumer said. "We plan to keep accepting as many amendments as possible from the other side of the aisle."

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a member of the Gang of Eight, who had cautioned the bill had shortcomings that must be addressed, praised the committee's work."The immigration legislation was improved in some areas. The bill will now do more to secure our borders and enforce our laws than when the day began," he said. "There's still a long way to go but I am encouraged that we are witnessing a transparent and deliberate process to accept input to improve this legislation."

It appears that the bill is getting support, as it is going thru the Senate Judiciary Committee.