

Immigration bill stalled, not dead, backers say

WASHINGTON - With the June 7 failure of a procedural vote intended to bring the bill to a vote, the Senate's attempt to pass comprehensive immigration reform will go back behind the scenes, though the bill's backers in both parties vowed to bring it to the floor again.

After the failure of a second cloture vote to cut off debate, Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said he would take the bill off the floor to allow other legislation to move along, though without closing the door to reviving its consideration.

Analysts on all sides have said that if immigration reform legislation isn't passed before the end of 2007, it's unlikely to get a serious shot at passage again until after the 2008 general election.

Some supporters of the bill accused President George W. Bush of failing to exert enough pressure on Senate Republicans to pass the bill. The legislation itself was the product of months of behind-the-scenes negotiations by the White House, Democratic and Republican senators.

That bill-shaping process was followed instead of the normal public crafting in committees. It was intended to satisfy enough members of both parties to head off exactly the kind of procedural machinations that occurred in the second week of debate on the bill.

While many supporters of comprehensive immigration reform, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the massive piece of legislation was flawed, most members of a vast alliance of faith groups, unions, civil rights groups and

business organizations were urging that the bill be passed, as a starting point to fixing a broken immigration system.

In a series of press conferences June 8, representatives of many of those organizations said they believe Reid is sincere about bringing the bill to a vote and that backroom efforts could yield a viable plan for allowing more debate and a limited number of amendments.

Such an effort might satisfy enough of the senators who voted to keep debate open, effectively blocking a final vote that Sen. Reid had hoped to hold June 8, said Frank Sharry, executive director of the National Immigration Forum, which represents a broad range of interest groups.

Mr. Sharry said he was much more optimistic about the possibility of a bill passing on June 8 than he was just the night before as the cloture vote failed.

The White House said Bush would use some of his time during a previously scheduled visit to the Capitol June 12 to try to persuade more Republicans to back the bill.

Meanwhile, House leaders have said they would bring their version of immigration reform to the floor before Congress recesses in August.