

US Senate Votes to Open Debate on Immigration Bill

From VOA Learning English, this is In the News.

Earlier this week, the United States Senate voted to begin debate on a historic immigration bill. The proposed law would offer a chance for more than 11 million undocumented immigrants, those not in the country legally, to become American citizens. It would also increase the number of foreign temporary technology workers at a time when American technology workers face high unemployment.

On Tuesday, President Barack Obama said this is “the best chance in years” to achieve “common sense reform.” He called on Congress to approve the bill.

“If you genuinely believe we need to fix our broken immigration system, there's no good reason to stand in the way of this bill.”

The vote to permit debate passed easily, 82-15. It clears the way for discussions that political observers say could extend through the rest of the month. The legislation establishes a 13-year citizenship process for immigrants who arrived in the United States illegally.

Public opinion studies released Thursday suggest wide support for the main

reforms. People in 29 states were asked questions about immigration. A majority supported reforms that included stronger border security, a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and laws to block employers from hiring people living in the United States illegally.

The studies did not ask about a disputed part of the bill that would increase the number of temporary foreign technology workers.

Labor rights groups and business groups disagree about that issue. Some businesses threatened to withdraw their support for immigration reform if the resulting bill did not drop a requirement that employers seek American workers before hiring foreigners.

Foreign scientists, engineers and computer programmers can live and work in the United States under special permits called H-1B visas. Many young scientists and engineers in India, China and other developing countries compete for the work permits. Large technology companies like Intel, Adobe and Microsoft had asked for an increased number of workers with H-1B visas.

A group representing American engineers had asked Congress to limit the number of foreign engineers as part of the bill. Instead, the new bill increases the number of H-1B visas.

rights groups strongly support citizenship for undocumented low

wage workers but dispute whether more temporary technology workers are needed in the United States. They say foreign workers force down wages.

In Washington, the New America Alliance held a discussion and news conference after the Senate vote. The alliance is made up of Latino American business people.

The event included an emotional statement by a young undocumented immigrant woman. Julieta Garibay works on legislation for an organization led by young immigrants called United We Dream.

“We deserve justice and dignity in this great country, because at the end of the day, to us this is not a bill of a thousand plus pages. This is our lives.”

And that’s In the News from VOA Learning English. I’m Alex Villareal.