



The Republican Caucus

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House Leadership to Senate: 'Work With Us for a Strong Immigration Bill'

COLUMBIA – The House Republican leadership urged the South Carolina Senate to take action on a strong bill fighting illegal immigration.

"The Senate needs to listen to Senators McConnell and Campsen and agree to remove the ineffective I-9 provisions from this bill," said Jim Merrill, the House Majority Leader. "Allowing use of the federal I-9 form isn't a true verification; it is a loophole that completely guts this bill."

The House Republican Caucus' plan to fight illegal immigration – named the "South Carolina Plan" and marked as the top priority for the Caucus in the 2008 legislative session – was approved by the House of Representatives in January.

Since going to a House-Senate conference committee last month, the South Carolina Plan has been held up because the Senate refuses to require employers to use the new federal e-Verify program. Instead, some senators are ignoring their colleagues and clinging to the antiquated I-9 form because of special-interest pressure.

While the Senate refuses to make the bill tougher, the number of illegal immigrants in South Carolina, and their cost to taxpayers, is continuing to climb. Illegal immigration in South Carolina has exploded 15 fold in the last decade. According to the best estimates, illegal immigrants cost South Carolina taxpayers more than \$186 million a year.

"The House version of this bill is comprehensive, real reform," said Jim Harrison, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. "We need this bill to pass quickly not only to deter illegal immigrants from coming to South Carolina, but in order to reward and welcome those immigrants who choose to take a legal path to live here."

The conference committee has come to many agreements, including requirements that employers with public contracts must hire legal workers.

"The voters of South Carolina have told us that fighting illegal immigration is their top priority this year," Merrill said. "The Senate needs to take action now and free their conference committee negotiators to do the right thing."