

Immigration Bill Roundup: Cash For Wall, Authority For USCIS

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Law360, New York (May 16, 2017, 7:59 PM EDT) -- Members of the 115th Congress took action on immigration-related bills in recent days that included measures that would redirect money from “sanctuary cities” to construction of a physical barrier along the nation’s southern border and that would reauthorize U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The proposals in this edition of Immigration Bill Roundup come from both the [U.S. Senate](#) and the [U.S. House of Representatives](#), where legislators on both sides of the aisle have weighed in with measures that address a variety of immigration policies.

Money for the Wall

An Alabama Republican appointed this year to Jeff Sessions’ former Senate seat introduced a bill Monday that would aim to redirect federal funds from “sanctuary cities” to construction of a wall along the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

The Securing the Border and Protecting Our Communities Act would take federal transportation dollars away from communities deemed to be harboring foreign nationals who are unauthorized to be in the U.S. and transfer the money to the effort to erect a border wall, according to the bill introduced by Sen. Luther Strange, R-Ala.

Sessions in March [threatened to withhold](#) Department of Justice grant funds from sanctuary cities and states that do not cooperate with federal efforts to enforce immigration laws.

"Democrats are desperate to keep President [Donald] Trump from building the wall," Strange wrote on his [Facebook](#) page. "If liberals don't want to follow the law, they can pay for the wall."

Authorization for DHS Agencies

House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., has introduced two bills that would formally grant authority to two Department of Homeland Security agencies and give them the ability to hire more than 10,000 immigration officers.

The bills would reauthorize [USCIS](#), authorize [Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#), establish in a statute the existence of ICE’s Homeland Security Investigations unit, allow ICE to hire the

officers and make permanent the E-Verify employment verification system, according to the legislation introduced May 11.

The ICE bill would legally authorize the agency to hire an additional 10,000 deportation officers, 2,500 detention officer and 60 immigration prosecutors, according to the legislation.

“My bill ensures a core mission of ICE is to enforce our immigration laws in order to protect public safety and national security, and to maintain the integrity of our immigration system,” Goodlatte said in a statement.

Faster Citizenship Process for Vets

A House bill introduced earlier this month would ease the process for current service members, military veterans and their families to become U.S. citizens.

The Support and Defend Our Military Personnel and Their Families Act, introduced May 3 by Reps. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., and Mike Thompson, D-Calif., would extend expedited naturalization to veterans who are not currently eligible, such as those who served in the armed conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo during the 1990s, according to an announcement from the legislators.

“If you put your life on your line to serve our country, protect our freedoms and keep us safe, you shouldn’t have to worry about your immigration status,” Thompson said in a statement. “More than 20,000 brave men and women currently serve in our Armed Forces as noncitizens. They risk so much for our country, we should make sure they and their families have a clear path to citizenship, free of bureaucratic red tape or [undue] hassle.”

Visas for Poland

A bill introduced earlier this month would allow Polish citizens to travel to the U.S. for tourism or business or while in transit for up to 90 days without needing to secure a visa beforehand.

The Poland Visa Waiver Act of 2017, introduced by Rep. Mike Quigley, D-Ill., would add the European country to the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#)’s Visa Waiver Program. It was referred to the House Judiciary Committee on May 4.

The European Parliament in March [passed a resolution](#) that encouraged the EU Commission — an arm of the [European Union](#) — to either force the U.S. to honor a visa reciprocity agreement that it hasn’t upheld for five EU states or prohibit visa-free travel for Americans traveling to the EU. The EU later backed down from the threat.

DHS Would Pay Local Legal Bills

A bill introduced earlier this month would ensure that members of local law enforcement who comply with requests by immigration agents to detain individuals suspected of being in the U.S. without authorization are protected by DHS from lawsuits.

The bill introduced May 4 by Sens. Jeff Flake and John McCain, both Arizona Republicans, would require the federal government to pay for any legal costs encumbered by local law enforcement as a result of their compliance with the detainer requests, according to the legislation.

“Our men and women in state and local law enforcement shouldn’t be sued for performing their lawful duties to keep our communities safe,” Flake said in a statement. “It’s fine to be critical of policies for complying with federal detention requests, but we can have that debate without jeopardizing public safety and the ability for local law enforcement officers to do their jobs.”

--Additional reporting by Kelcee Griffis. Editing by Sara Ziegler.

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