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Greenville lawmakers push immigration bill

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GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON -- Greenville area lawmakers voted for a discharge petition today to force a vote on legislation that would strengthen border security and tighten requirements on employers to verify workers' legal immigration status.

Reps. Bob Inglis, R-Travelers Rest, and Gresham Barrett, R-Westminster, joined other Republicans in supporting the legislation offered by Rep. Heath Shuler, D-N.C. The Republican leadership supports the move because it would force Democrats to take up the immigration issue.

"The (Democratic) Party has blocked this important piece of legislation from coming to the floor for debate, even though our borders remain broken," Barrett said. "Securing our borders should be a top priority of this Congress."

The bill also would spend more on workplace enforcement of immigration laws and require employers to verify workers' status through a Department of Homeland Security database, which currently is voluntary. Shuler introduced his legislation in November, but it has yet to be scheduled for a committee hearing.

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A discharge petition needs 218 signatures to force a vote on the House floor. The last one to pass was in 2002, when a majority of House members voted to approve a campaign-finance reform bill over the objections of Republican leaders. It took nearly six months to attract enough signatures.

The immigration discharge petition had 94 signatures as of Tuesday afternoon.
