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Inglis, Barrett support bill on immigration

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GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON -- Reps. Bob Inglis and J. Gresham Barrett said they signed up to co-sponsor a bill that seeks to limit illegal immigration by requiring employers to verify their workers are in the U.S. legally.

"It's not the entire solution that's needed, but it is a step toward the solution," said Inglis, R-Travelers Rest, late Tuesday.

"Immigration is the No. 1 issue" among his constituents, he said. "It's mentioned more often than Iraq by a substantial margin."

Rep. Heath Shuler, D-N.C., introduced legislation Tuesday that would increase border security and spend more on workplace enforcement of immigration laws. It also would require employers to verify workers' status through a Department of Homeland Security database, which currently is voluntary. He has 89 co-sponsors, including Barrett, R-Westminster.

Advertisement "The legislation is very in-line with his position when it comes to immigration reform -- understanding that we need to secure the border first and foremost," Barrett spokesman Brecke Latham said Tuesday.

Shuler's bill "seems to be one of the most extensive enforcement bills introduced," said Steven Camarota, research director at the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington. His group favors stronger enforcement of immigration laws.

Typically, freshmen lawmakers stand little chance of getting difficult bills through the House, he said.

But the Democrats who control Congress are struggling with immigration policy, just as Republicans did prior to 2006, Camarota said. Many Americans are frustrated that so many immigrants continue to cross the Mexican border illegally, he said.

"I think there's real fear of the issue in the Democratic Party," Camarota said.

Democracy Corps, a polling company run by Democrats Stan Greenberg and James Carville, released a memo last week warning Democrats that illegal immigration has caused current voter discontent. Many Americans wonder why the U.S. has lost control of its borders and doesn't go after illegal employment, the memo said.

But stronger enforcement will do little to stem the tide of illegal immigration because the U.S. economy has a big need for workers, said Douglas Rivlin, a spokesman for the National Immigration Forum, which supports comprehensive immigration reform.
