

## Legislature tries to tackle illegal immigration issue

Owen Kennedy

**Date:** Monday, March 31, 2008

Illegal immigration has been a priority of federal government, as well as state and local governments for years, and Kansas is no exception. After months of trying, the state legislature is close to an agreement on how to deal with illegal immigration.

The House and the Senate passed similar, but not identical, bills Friday. The House passed its version of a bill Friday afternoon and the Senate approved its version hours later. Rep. Sydney Carlin, D-Manhattan, said debate on the House bill was heated and was anything but quick and easy.

"It was hotly debated," Carlin said of the bill. "We did go through a lot of amendments to make the best bill."

She said many amendments were proposed during the debate, and the bill changed greatly during discussion. The final vote for the House version was 96-27.

The House bill would criminalize identity and voter fraud, and employers would be required to use a federal database, called E-Verify, that checks citizenship statuses of workers, according to a Kansas House Democratic Caucus press release.

Before the laws can go to the governor to be signed, the Senate and the House will have to pass the same bill. Carlin said that will take some work.

"We'll probably get another vote or two," she said.

The Senate's bill would outlaw human trafficking and using a false identity to get a job. In fact, the biggest point of disagreement for the legislation was how to deal with businesses that might hire illegal workers.

"It is an effort to crack down on businesses that knowingly hire illegal workers or recruit them to come work for them," Carlin said.

Carlin also said the House is wary of laws that are strict, and they hurt businesses in Kansas. She said other states have seen the effects of laws that go too far.

"Oklahoma has suffered a lot of devastation," she said. "Strict laws have caused an economic hit on their state. Immigrants are leaving the state, and they don't show up for work because they are afraid."

