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Salazar fears 'crazies' may halt plan

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Sen. Ken Salazar said Wednesday he worries about "House crazies" derailing a proposed guest worker plan and what he considers a "workable" immigration reform package.

In a conference call with reporters, Salazar, D-Colo., did not identify the "crazies," but he was using a nickname that a fellow Coloradan, Republican Rep. Tom Tancredo, once embraced when he served in the state legislature.

Several competing versions of immigration reform are pending in the U.S. Senate. On Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee will consider a version that combines various elements of border protection, employment verification and employer sanctions, and a guest worker plan, which could grant temporary, legal status to millions of undocumented workers.

Tancredo has been among the most vocal critics, saying the bill by Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., is an "unmitigated disaster," primarily because of the guest-worker provisions.

President Bush has said that some form of guest-worker program is needed for there to be true immigration reform. Salazar said he discussed the issue with Bush last month.

"I think the emotionalism around the immigration issue needs to be tempered with a dose of reality of what we're facing in this country," Salazar said.

Salazar supports an approach by Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., that includes a guest-worker plan, although he said he also is waiting to see other provisions in the overall package.

"We'll look at a lot of the proposals that are out there, but I think we are going to get a good, sensible proposal coming out of the Senate," Salazar said.

When the bill gets to the House of Representatives, Salazar added, "I'm hopeful that that's where the president can himself weigh in and try to make sure that the House crazies don't derail a workable immigration reform package."

Salazar was asked if he was referring to Tancredo. "I'm not going to mention anybody by name, but I think there are some people who are not being realistic at all about the creation of a sensible immigration reform package," Salazar said.

Tancredo said Salazar probably couldn't address the "crazies" by name "because they're the majority of the American population."

"Most Americans and most of Sen. Salazar's constituents want enforcement first," Tancredo said. "They do not want any kind of guest-worker/amnesty proposal moving forward" that he said would reward people who entered the country illegally.

Tancredo later released a statement pointing out that Salazar's definition of "House crazies" would include 36 Democrats who supported the immigration reform bill that passed late last year, including his brother, Rep. John Salazar, D-Manassa.

That drew a quick clarification from Nayyera Haq, a spokeswoman for Rep. Salazar: "I assure you, Congressman Salazar is not the crazy one in the delegation."