# A Senate Plan Alters Waiting Periods for Immigration Doug Mills(The New York Times 19/03/13)

A Senate Plan Alters Waiting Periods for Immigration Doug Mills(The New York Times 19/03/13)By MICHAEL D. SHEAR and ASHLEY PARKERWASHINGTON &mdash; The nation&rsquo;s 11 million illegal immigrants would have to wait a full decade for a green card but could earn citizenship just three years after that, under a provision being finalized by a bipartisan group of eight senators working to devise an overhaul of immigration law, several people with knowledge of the negotiations said.  Taken together, the two waiting periods would provide the nation&rsquo;s illegal immigrants with a path to United States citizenship in 13 years, matching the draft of a plan by President Obama to offer full participation in American democracy to millions who are living in fear of deportation.  The arrangement would shrink the amount of time it takes to become a naturalized citizen, to three years from five years. But in an appeal to Republicans, it would also extend to 10 years, from 8, the amount of time that illegal immigrants must wait before receiving permission to work in the United States permanently.  Such a compromise might give both sides something to crow about: Republicans could argue that they pushed for a longer waiting period before a person could get a green card, which allows its holder to remain and work in the United States indefinitely. Democrats could say that illegal immigrants would become citizens faster.  &ldquo;It is an unusual construction, but it gets them to citizenship in the same time as the administration plan,&rdquo; said Kevin Appleby, the director of migration policy at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. &ldquo;Most importantly, it eliminates the prospect of a permanent underclass by ensuring that, in time, all will have the opportunity to become Americans.&rdquo;  Negotiations among the senators have intensified significantly in recent days as they push toward a goal of announcing comprehensive immigration legislation in early April. Senators from both parties and their staffs met for hours on Thursday as they struggled to overcome obstacles that several people familiar with the negotiations said could hinder a deal in the weeks ahead.  Among those obstacles is a continuing concern among Republicans that a three-year naturalization process for illegal immigrants could give them a faster path to citizenship than people who enter legally. One possible solution, officials said, would be to reduce the wait for citizenship to three years for everyone. But they said the agreement could still unravel.  &ldquo;We can&rsquo;t create a system where it&rsquo;s faster for illegal immigrants than for legal immigrants,&rdquo; said one Republican familiar with the internal debate who spoke on the condition of anonymity. &ldquo;Republicans are clear that they are not going to create a special pathway to citizenship.&rdquo;  The senators also remain at odds over a series of other major issues, including the establishment of a guest-worker program for low-skilled immigrants; a better system for companies to verify the immigration status of job applicants; determining who has the final authority to declare the borders secure; and modifying rules that prioritize the family members who can immigrate to the United States legally.  One big sticking point has become the visa program for low-skilled, year-round, temporary workers. In February, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the A.F.L.-C.I.O. reached a compromise that acknowledged the need for a system that would allow businesses to meet their demand for lower-skilled labor, while still protecting American workers.  But the two groups remain divided on the number of visas the new program should offer, said Randel K. Johnson, the chamber&rsquo;s lead negotiator on immigration. The chamber, he said, wants 400,000 visas, while the A.F.L.-C.I.O. prefers a number in the &ldquo;very, very low five figures.&rdquo; Ana Avendaño, the director of immigration for the A.F.L.-C.I.O., refused to discuss a specific number, but said &ldquo;the whole notion is to create a system that responds to the needs of the economy.&rdquo;  The bipartisan group of eight senators is also still debating how to improve E-Verify, the system that employers use to check the immigration status of their workers. A high-tech, biometric identification card was deemed too costly; instead, the group is considering an enhanced E-Verify system that would allow employers to use photographs to identify job applicants and would let workers provide answers to security questions to help prove their legal work status.  But despite the remaining differences, the eight senators who are in negotiations are continuing to make steady progress toward an overall deal, according to people familiar with the talks. Mr. Obama, who has threatened to push forward with his own legislation if Senate efforts stall, is satisfied with the current pace of talks, White House officials said.