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## Immigration bills having a tough time in session

published on Wednesday, March 4, 2009 10:23 PM MST

By DANIEL PERSON Chronicle Staff Writer

HELENA - State-level attempts at immigration reform are receiving some support this session, but the Montana Legislature is still a frosty place to attempt a crackdown on undocumented workers in the United States.

The Senate on Wednesday thwarted a bill that would have criminalized a number of interactions with illegal aliens in Montana, including knowingly transporting illegal aliens into the state and concealing them from detection, in some cases making the transgressions a felony. The bill also would have allowed the state to seize property connected to the violation.

The Senate voted 29-20 against Senate Bill 379, sponsored by Sen. Gary Perry, R-Manhattan.

In failing to pass, Perry's bill joined most other immigration bills introduced this session.

In the Senate, bills attempting to keep vehicle registration and some workers compensation away from undocumented workers have failed to gain traction. In the House bills introduced by Rep. David Howard, R-Park City, have also been defeated.

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Perry's frustration was evident after Wednesday's floor vote.

"My impression is that we, overall, don't seem to be as law abiding as I thought we were," he said. "Perhaps it's idealistic to think we obey our laws. Instead, for social liberalism, we ignore our laws."

But not everyone is taking a negative view of the votes.

"The biggest problem across the board with these bills is the racial-profiling aspect," said Shahid Haque-Hausrath, a lawyer in Helena who has been lobbying against the legislation.

He said all of the bills would have required state agencies and employers to do more to verify whether someone is lawfully in the country. That's not as easy as some think, he said, and he fears that non-whites or people with accents would have to jump through more hoops for government services than others.

Of the 10 bills Haque-Hausrath has been tracking, only two have made it out of their chambers, with another still to have a hearing. He commended lawmakers for looking into the full implications of the bills.

"The problem is, the bills are fairly complex and immigration laws are fairly complex. (Lawmakers) are hearing from people who tell them immigrants are taking their jobs. But I think you're getting a lot of people who read these bills more carefully," he said.

The Montana Human Rights Network has also opposed the legislation. Jamee Greer, a lobbyist for the group, said he has seen opposition to the bills come from many sides.

"People are opposing these bills for a lot of different reasons - farmers and ranchers concerned about how this will impact their operations, small businesses concerned about how this will affect their family businesses, concerns about racial profiling," he said.

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Sen. Jim Shockley, R-Victor, has also introduced a number of immigration bills this session. He said two bills passed out of the Senate this session is two better than in 2007 n and credited that to the Republicans having party control.

"The Democrats don't want to do anything on illegal immigration," he said.

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