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Film shows Kennedy battle for immigration reform

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By [Christine Kearney](#)

NEW YORK (Reuters) - As Democrats in Washington celebrate the passage of healthcare reform after an arduous battle, a new documentary offers a glimpse at the behind-the-scenes maneuvering and deal-making that goes on as laws are made in Congress.

The film, "The Senators' Bargain," follows the late Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts and other key players in the failed effort to pass landmark immigration reform in 2007. It takes on the complicated task of showing how compromises are made to a bill even before it is debated by lawmakers.

"It is a portrait of lawmaking from the inside," said Shari Robertson, who spent almost a decade making the film with her husband, Michael Camerini.

Part of the focus of the film, which airs on HBO on Wednesday, is Kennedy, a longtime champion of immigration.

"I do think that this is the portrait of him that people haven't seen, the actual guy working," Camerini said.

Kennedy, a liberal standard bearer and consummate congressional dealmaker known as "the lion of the Senate," died of cancer last year, aged 77, after 47 years as a senator.

Robertson said Kennedy immediately agreed to the project in 2001 and was surprised someone wanted to tackle such an unglamorous subject.

"He did get a real kick out of it," she said.

"IDEALISTIC TOWN"

Kennedy and immigration advocates, lawyers and politicians are seen in cramped Capitol Hill meeting rooms discussing what compromises to make with Republicans on immigration. Kennedy makes concessions in exchange for guarantees that millions of illegal immigrants could remain in the United States.

The film shows Kennedy and others dealing with the bill's demise in June 2007 after the compromise failed to muster enough votes among lawmakers or sufficient public support.

"It was really understanding that intersection of politics and policy-making," Robertson said. "In a way we were like kids in a candy store because we were right in the middle of it."

The story also answers some criticisms of Washington such as the length of time it takes a bill to wend its way to a vote and why politics can be so partisan.

People who have seen the film say, "Now I understand why you are never going to get exactly what you want because you have got to find a compromise," Robertson said.

With immigration now looming on President Barack Obama's agenda, the public needs to understand more than ever the need to be able to negotiate, Camerini said.

"The lessons of healthcare are going to make people understand the necessity of a compromise much better," he said.

On Tuesday, Obama signed a healthcare reform law designed to revamp the \$2.5 trillion U.S. healthcare industry and extend insurance coverage to 32 million uninsured Americans. Kennedy had long sought to pass such a law but never had enough support for such a measure and Obama hailed him upon signing the bill.



(Editing by [Mark Egan](#) and [Bill Trott](#))

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