

Varied reactions greet White House immigration plan

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WASHINGTON (BP)—The White House’s immigration reform plan—which would provide a pathway to citizenship for about 1.8 million undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children—garnered a wide range of reactions after its main planks were unveiled Jan. 25.

The proposal includes not only a solution for the immigrant category known as Dreamers, but also \$25 billion for a wall on the country’s southern border and other border security measures, as well as an end to extended-family “chain migration.”

‘A good starting point’

After the Trump Administration called for the U.S. Senate to bring the proposal to the floor, reactions to the plan varied from hopefulness to fierce opposition.

Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said he was pleased the White House is offering a plan for Dreamers but acknowledged it was a beginning to a process.

“I’m especially glad (the framework) outlines a path to citizenship” for Dreamers, Moore said. “This is a good starting point for Congress to get to work. Our immigration system has been broken for too long, and it’s well past time to pass a permanent solution.”

Officials on opposite sides of the immigration debate “must be willing to

make a compromise to get the job done,” said Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

“While there are certainly aspects of this proposal either party may disagree on, there is also much they can celebrate,” he said. “Let us accomplish a bold and lasting solution for childhood arrivals, and yes, let us deliver enhanced border security too.”

Deep division

Differences over the White House proposal could be seen within the Senate Republican caucus.

Sen. James Lankford, R-Okla., applauded the White House for presenting “a solid framework” for reform and urged Congress quickly to begin a debate “focused on solutions, not partisanship.”

“This framework provides certainty for families, enacts common-sense reforms to nuclear family sponsorship policy and protects our nation,” Lankford said. “Ignoring our many immigration problems is a form of amnesty that must end.”

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, balked at citizenship for Dreamers.

“I do not believe we should be granting a path to citizenship to anybody here illegally,” Cruz said, according to *The Hill* newspaper. “Doing so is inconsistent with the promises we made to the men and women who elected us.”

Mike Needham, chief executive officer of the conservative Heritage Action for America, described the proposal on Dreamers as amnesty, saying, “If any amnesty negotiations are to take place, they should remain extremely limited in scope so as not to encourage further illegal immigration.”

Dreamers ‘held hostage’ to desire for border wall

Democrats criticized proposals related to funding for the border wall and the limitation of family sponsorships to immediate family members.

“Dreamers should not be held hostage to President Trump’s crusade to tear families apart and waste billions of American tax dollars on an ineffective wall,” said Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., a leader in bipartisan Senate negotiations on the issue.

The Trump plan “would put the Administration’s entire hardline immigration agenda ... on the backs of these young people,” Durbin said.

Rep. Michelle Lujan Grisham, D-N.M., chairwoman of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, called the White House plan “shameful.”

Basic element of White House plan outlined

The four pillars, as the White House describes them, of the framework are:

- Securing the border through, among other proposals, a \$25 billion trust fund for a southern border wall system and improvements on the northern border, as well as increased removal of some in the country illegally.
- A 10- to 12-year path to citizenship for Dreamers who meet work, education and character requirements.
- Restricting family sponsorships to spouses and minor children.
- Eliminating the visa lottery for countries with low rates of immigration to this country.

Sen. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., expressed hope members of the Senate from both parties “will look to this framework for guidance as they work towards an agreement.”

Deadline for Dreamers near

A solution for Dreamers, a label that stems from the name of a bill introduced to protect this category of immigrants, is nearing a March 5 deadline set by Trump. The administration announced Sept. 5 it would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program but also instituted a six-month delay for Congress to act.

President Obama established the program in question by executive order in 2012 to protect undocumented immigrants who arrived in this country before their 16th birthday. DACA has provided relief for deportation for about 800,000 people. The order to protect Dreamers came after Congress failed for more than a decade to pass proposals to address the issue.

The effort to provide a solution for Dreamers is only one of many issues involved in reforming America’s immigration system. An estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants are in the United States, but congressional efforts to enact a comprehensive measure have failed.

‘A special category of immigrants’

In early October, Moore of the ERLC brought together 51 evangelical leaders— including four former SBC presidents—in a statement endorsing “the underlying policy aim” of DACA “because we believe this is a special category of immigrants who are not legally culpable, who in most cases have no home other than the United States, and who are a blessing to their communities and to their churches.”

Those who have taken part in DACA have pursued education, worked and paid taxes, served in the military and refused to become involved in crime, the statement noted.

“A solution for Dreamers rightly excludes those convicted of felonies or multiple misdemeanors,” the signers said.

Messengers to the 2011 SBC meeting in Phoenix approved a resolution on immigration reform that called for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus while pursuing justice and compassion. The measure urged the government to make a priority of border security and hold businesses accountable in their hiring.

The resolution also requested public officials establish after securing the borders “a just and compassionate path to legal status, with appropriate restitutionary measures, for those undocumented immigrants already living in our country.” It specified the resolution was not to be interpreted as supporting amnesty.

The resolution acknowledged immigration reform “has prompted often-rancorous debate in the American public square.” During consideration of the resolution, an amendment to remove the paragraph regarding establishment of a “path to legal status” failed in a ballot vote of 51-48 percent.

At least seven months could be required to implement long-term relief for Dreamers if and when Congress approves a measure, the National Immigration Forum and the Niskanen Center have reported. Beginning March 5, about 1,000 people a day will lose their protection from deportation, according to their report.

In 2001, members of Congress proposed for the first time the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act—hence the name Dreamers for those in this category of undocumented immigrants. The measure gained

reintroduction several times thereafter without passing before Obama acted.