

Deferred action seen as turning point in fight for immigration reform

Posted on June 15, 2013 By [Griselda Nevarez Dreamers](#)

Saturday marks one year since President Barack Obama announced that undocumented youth would be allowed to stay and work in the United States under the deferred action program. Many view that day as the turning point in the fight for immigration reform.

“From advocates to my family watching the announcement on TV, when they saw that a win was possible, it renewed their sense of believe and hope that immigration reform could also be something that we can achieve,” Myrna Orozco, national field director for the immigrant youth-led group United We Dream, told VOXXI.

Obama’s announcement of the federal program — officially known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) — came on June 15, 2012, and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) began accepting applications for it on Aug. 15, 2012. Of the 520,157 requests for deferred action that have been accepted, as many as 365,237 have been approved, according to the [latest data](#) from USCIS.

Some of the requirements to qualify for the deferred action program include being between the ages of 15 and 31, entered the U.S. before the age of 16, resided in the U.S. for five years, and either be currently in school or have a high school diploma or GED.

The White House released a statement Saturday stating that because of the deferred action program, “thousands of ambitious, hardworking young people have been able to emerge from the shadows, no longer living in fear of deportation.”

“But the steps we took were never meant to be a permanent solution,” Obama said in a statement issued by the White House stated. “That’s why we need Congress to pass a bipartisan, commonsense immigration reform bill as soon as possible so that these “Dreamers” can keep contributing to this country and help us live up to our history as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants.”

Deferred action renews hope for immigration reform

Deferred action program helped gain momentum for immigration reform. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

When America’s Voice executive director Frank Sharry spoke to VOXXI in December, he predicted that the announcement of the deferred action program would be viewed as “the turning point” in the battle for immigration reform.

He was right.

Coupled with the Latino voter turnout seen in the 2012 election, Obama's announcement of the deferred action program gave hope to advocates that immigration reform was possible. It also set the stage for the recent unprecedented efforts to push for an [overhaul of the nation's immigration system](#) and a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

In recent months, key Republican leaders in the Senate and House have stepped up to the plate to draft an immigration reform bill and other Republicans have endorsed the legislation. Democrats have also been key in drafting the bill and garnering support for it.

There's also a growing list of individuals who up until recently, were unlikely supporters of immigration reform. The list includes Tea Party leaders, evangelicals and conservative lawmakers.

What's more, support for immigration reform among the general public is perhaps the strongest it's ever been. A [poll released Thursday](#) shows there is overwhelming bipartisan support for the immigration legislation proposed in the Senate by the "Gang of Eight." In the 29 states polled, public support for the bill ranges from 61 percent to 78 percent.

"This is the best chance in a generation to enact immigration reform with a path to citizenship," Sharry said during a call with reporters Thursday. "The American people strongly support the effort, it is in the best interest of both parties to deliver on the promise of reform, and our movement is getting stronger every day."

Deferred action helped Obama get reelected

Former Washington Post journalist turned immigration reform activist, Jose Antonio Vargas, right, is overcome with emotion speaking to Gaby Pacheco, a Dreamer from Miami, after watching President Obama announced the deferred action program on June 15, 2012, in Washington. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

Advocates argue that the deferred action program not only helped [gain momentum for immigration reform](#), it also helped improve Obama's approval ratings among Latino voters, which ultimately led to his reelection.

The announcement of the deferred action program came during a time when Latinos and immigrant rights leaders distrusted Obama on immigration reform. The distrust stemmed from the fact that his administration was overseeing historically high levels of deportations and because many Latinos felt he wasn't doing enough to deliver on his 2008 campaign promise to push for immigration reform.

But once Obama announced the deferred action program in the Rose Garden of the White House last year, support from Latinos surged. A USA TODAY/Pew Research Center [poll](#) shows that 48 percent of Latinos approved of Obama's job in office in the last quarter of 2011. The president's approval rating rebounded to 75 percent by the end of 2012 and it has held at 73 percent in the first quarter of 2013.

Lia Parada, legislative director for America's Voice, describes Obama's announcement of the deferred action program as "the burst of energy that really reignited the Latino community behind President Obama and really changed the politics we're seeing today on immigration reform."

"This completely changed the game," Parada said of deferred action. "It sent a huge message to the Latino community that while immigration reform isn't happening right now, this president is committed to moving the ball forward."

Sharry agreed with Parada, saying the deferred action program "became a huge political victory" for Obama, who was reelected last November with 71 percent of the Latino vote.

What led to the deferred action announcement

From left, Myisha Areloano, Adrian James, Jahel Campos, David Vuenrostro, and Antonio Cabrera camp outside of the Obama Campaign Headquarters in Culver City, Calif. in protest of President Obama's immigration policies and in hopes of getting him to pass an executive order to halt discretionary deportation in June 2012. (AP Photo/Grant Hindsley)

Convincing Obama to announce the deferred action program didn't happen overnight.

In fact, the announcement came after Dreamers spent years pressuring the president to use his executive power to stop the deportations of undocumented youth. These efforts intensified after Dreamers saw their dreams of gaining citizenship crushed in 2010 when the DREAM Act died in the Senate. The bill was five votes shy of the 60 votes required to overcome a filibuster.

A key moment in the Dreamers' plight for deferred action occurred during Obama's speech at the National Council of La Raza's 2011 conference in Washington, D.C. After stating he could not bypass Congress and put in place any policy protecting undocumented youth from deportation, he was interrupted by dreamers and the crowd who joined in chanting, "Yes, you can!"

Then, a year later, he announced the deferred action program.

"It showed the power of Dreamers," Julieta Garibay, a legislative affairs associate with United We Dream, told VOXXI. "It showed that even when the president tells you 'No, I can't do it,' even when advocates tell you, 'Don't push anymore because it's not going to happen,' we stuck to our guns and said, 'No, we are going to push until we get this.'"

Garibay added that the announcement of the deferred action program also shifted the way many advocates started thinking about how to approach the immigration issue.

"They realize that you can't take no for an answer," she said.

Read more: <http://www.voxxi.com/deferred-action-immigration-reform>