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Ex-Bush attorney general backs executive action on immigration

By [Mario Trujillo](#)

Former Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, who served under George W. Bush, on Tuesday offered support for President Obama to take executive action on immigration reform.

In an op-ed for [USA Today](#), Gonzales said the courts tend to defer to executive discretion and that Obama would have latitude to act if his actions were limited.

"I support the President's commitment to address this issue provided his actions are consistent with his duty under the Constitution to faithfully execute our laws," he said.

"Determining the limits of the president's inherent power to act in the absence of either an express constitutional or congressional grant of authority is one of the most difficult challenges in constitutional law," he continued.

Gonzales noted that some legal scholars say the president has no authority to act without Congress, while others believe he has expansive powers.

"Still others believe, as I do, the scope of the president's inherent power lies somewhere along the spectrum between these two extremes," he said.

The former attorney general said Obama would likely be criticized however he acts and that the debate over any executive action would play out in the "public arena."

But Gonzales said the country should not let the "souls of innocent children" be caught in a constitutional fight, citing the massive influx of young migrants who have crossed the border in recent months.

"This is not just a classroom exercise or court room drama," he said. "This is a real world crisis involving human beings."

Obama has pledged to use executive action to push forward with immigration reform after efforts to pass legislation in Congress stalled.

Attorney General Eric Holder and other officials are [slated to outline](#) a number of steps the president can take to relax deportation policies later this year, within the scope of the law.

The immigration debate has also been fueled by the crisis on the southwest border, where thousands of unaccompanied minors have entered the U.S.

Gonzales said the thousands of children streaming across the border should be given their day in court. But he called for officials to stop releasing them into the U.S. until their deportation hearings — months or years away.

"When he acts, the president should leave no doubt that while we are a compassionate nation that takes care of children, we are also a nation of laws and will enforce those laws to secure our borders," he said.

Gonzales has been an advocate of comprehensive immigration reform for years.

Last year, he criticized a Senate-passed bill because it did not go far enough in providing a path to citizenship for many of the millions of illegal immigrants living in the country.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/214987-former-gop-attorney-general-supports-limited-executive-action-on>