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Immigration Is Lead Topic as Leaders Are Gathered

By [JULIA PRESTON](#)

[President Obama](#) told a gathering of business, labor, religious and political leaders at the White House on Tuesday that he remains committed to an overhaul of the nation's [immigration](#) laws and wants to try again in the coming months to push Congress to pass a bill.

With his re-election campaign launched this month and Latino communities growing increasingly frustrated with his immigration policies, Mr. Obama summoned more than 60 high-profile supporters of the stalled overhaul legislation to a strategy session, looking for ways to revive it. Among those attending were Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) of New York, an independent; Mayor Julian Castro of San Antonio, a Democrat; and former Gov. [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) of California, a Republican.

Two big-city police chiefs, [Raymond W. Kelly](#) of New York and Charles Ramsey of Philadelphia, were there, as was Sheryl Sandberg, a top executive at Facebook, and Leith Anderson, president of the [National Association of Evangelicals](#), the largest group of evangelical Christians.

Prospects for the proposed policy, which would grant legal status to millions of illegal immigrants and revamp the immigration system, seem bleak in this Congress, with staunch Republican opponents of the bill controlling pivotal committee positions in the House of Representatives. Recently Latino leaders have stepped up their criticism of Mr. Obama, as deportations have reached record numbers under his administration and he has offered no relief from the crackdown on immigrant communities.

Latino voters helped several Democrats, including Senator [Harry Reid](#) of Nevada, the majority leader, survive the Republican shift in the midterm elections last fall, and they are expected to be a major force in the presidential vote next year.

In the closed meeting, Mr. Obama argued that the overhaul would bring immigrant entrepreneurs to the United States and was a crucial piece of the economic recovery, according to several people who attended. He sought views on whether to try to pass smaller pieces of the massive overhaul, such as a bill that would give legal status to illegal immigrant students, or one that would increase visas for highly skilled foreign workers.

The president asked for help to “change the debate” to attract Republicans to support the bill. He said he could not pass the overhaul “if I am leading the debate alone,” according to [a White House statement](#).

Mr. Bloomberg suggested recasting the acrimonious discussion over the proposed policy to stress that it would not take jobs from Americans but would help the economy, said John Feinblatt, the chief policy adviser to the mayor, who was in the room.

“We need an immigration policy that attracts the best, brightest and hardest working to our shores to help create jobs and spur growth,” Mr. Bloomberg said. He has started a national campaign in support of the immigration bill.