

Immigration advocates happy at inaugural mention, eager for action

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WASHINGTON – Latino groups, citing the mention of immigration reform and the prominent role Hispanics played in Monday’s inauguration, said they are optimistic that President Barack Obama can move beyond words to action in his second term.

In a 15-minute [inaugural address](#) that touched on everything from climate change to gun control and budget battles, Obama said the nation also needs to address immigration reform.

“Our journey is not complete until we find a better way to welcome the striving, hopeful immigrants who still see America as a land of opportunity,” he said. “Until bright young students and engineers are enlisted in our workforce rather than expelled from our country.”

The comments were not surprising, given the amount of Hispanic support for the president’s re-election, said Petra Falcon, executive director of [Promise Arizona](#).

“It was important for him to do that to acknowledge that there is a constituency ... out there that approves his position on immigration reform,” she said.

But others said this constituency expects results on immigration reform, which they said Obama has been talking about and campaigning on since he first ran for president.

“We’ve been hearing pretty much the same words for the past four years,” said Cesar Vargas, executive political director of the [DRM Action Coalition](#). “Now, no more words. Action.”

Vargas has not given up on the president, but said he wants to remind Congress that it doesn’t have to wait for Obama. It can develop its own immigration-reform strategy.

In fact, Vargas said, that might be the better route since Obama “has shown not the most impressive record on immigration leadership.”

Clarissa Martinez, director of immigration and civic engagement for National Council of [La Raza](#), said that while it was nice to hear immigration reform mentioned Monday, it was just as important to see the inclusion of Latinos in the inauguration.

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor swore in Vice President Joseph Biden, the Rev. Luis Leon gave the benediction and Richard Blanco read a poem, the first Latino to do so at an inaugural. Leon and Blanco also spoke briefly in Spanish during the event.

“Seeing ourselves as part and parcel of that very important ceremony I think was very significant for the community,” Martinez said.

Of the major issues cited by Obama, including fiscal problems and gun control, Martinez thinks immigration might be the easiest to solve. Not because it is an easy issue, she said, but because it has been discussed for so many years.

Martinez said she expects Obama to have more immigration-reform specifics when he delivers his State of the Union address next month. He has mentioned immigration reform and illegal immigration in each of his past three State of the Union addresses.

Rep. Ed Pastor, D-Phoenix, said he also expects the president to deliver a more detailed reform plan in his address next month.

Pastor said November’s election results give greater impetus to immigration reform, which other hot-button issues like fiscal responsibility and gun control might not enjoy this year.

“If you’re a betting guy, you’d bet that the probability is higher here,” Pastor said. “I don’t know about easier, but the probability is higher that it may happen if you look at the other ones (issues).”

Pastor said that immigration reform might come to the forefront in early April. Vargas said he would ideally like to see some action on the issue within the next three months.

Vargas said more Republican leaders are speaking about immigration reform, which gives him more hope for action than the president’s speech.

“It’s not so much what the president said, because he has said the same thing for the past four years. It’s what everyone else is saying that makes it much more encouraging what we heard (Monday),” Vargas said.

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