

Immigration reform: Similarities and differences between Obama, Senate proposals

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President Barack Obama endorsed a framework for immigration reform Tuesday that largely mirrored one unveiled a day earlier by a bipartisan group of senators — with a few important differences. A look at the elements included in each of the plans:

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PATH TO CITIZENSHIP

Senate:

— Create a path to citizenship for an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants already in the country, but not until increased border security measures are completed.

— Create a commission of lawmakers and border-state community leaders to make a recommendation about when security measures are completed.

— While security measures are under way, illegal immigrants can register, pass background checks and pay fines and back taxes to earn “probationary legal status.”

— Once security measures are in place, immigrants on “probationary legal status” could apply for permanent residency behind other immigrants already in the system after they prove their employment history and learn English and civics.

Obama:

— Create a path to citizenship for an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants, with “provisional legal status” and a green card as intermediary steps, regardless of whether border security measures are completed.

— Illegal immigrants can earn “provisional legal status” by registering, passing background checks and paying fees and penalties.

— Immigrants on “provisional legal status” could get in line for permanent residency behind other immigrants already in the system.

— Five years after receiving permanent residency, immigrants can apply for citizenship.

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BORDER SECURITY

Senate:

— Add unmanned drones, surveillance equipment and more agents at and between ports of entry.

— Create an entry-exit system to track whether people in the U.S. on temporary visas have left as required.

Obama:

— Improve infrastructure at ports of entry and use public-private partnerships to boost investment in technology for foreign visitor processing.

— Create new criminal penalties for those who smuggle people, drugs, weapons or money across the border and crack down on passport and visa fraud.

— Deport convicted criminals at the end of their prison sentences and streamline the process for removing those who overstay their visas or pose a national security threat.

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YOUNG IMMIGRANTS

Senate:

— People brought to the U.S. as children would have a quicker path to citizenship.

Obama:

— People brought to the U.S. as children would have same path to citizenship, but could expedite that path by attending college or serving for two years in the military.

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LEGAL IMMIGRATION

Senate:

— Reduce backlogs in family and employment visas.

— Allow more lower-skilled immigrants to come to the country when the economy is creating jobs than when it's not.

— Permit workers who have succeeded in the workplace and contributed to their communities over years to earn green cards.

— Create an agricultural worker program and allow employers to hire immigrants if they can demonstrate that American workers aren't available.

Obama:

— Raise the annual cap for how many family-sponsored immigrants can come from any given country from 7 percent to 15 percent.

— Temporarily increase annual visa numbers by an unspecified amount.

— Create “startup visa” for job-creating entrepreneurs and expand visa opportunities for those who invest in the U.S.

— Allow greater flexibility to add countries to the visa waiver program for tourists and let the State Department waive interview requirements for very low-risk visitors.

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HIGHLY SKILLED IMMIGRANTS

Senate:

— Award green cards to immigrants who obtain advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering or math from American universities.

Obama:

— Award green cards to immigrants who obtain advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering or math from American universities.

— Create a new visa category for highly skilled immigrants to work in federal science and technology labs on national security programs after being in the U.S. for two years and passing background checks.

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SAME-SEX COUPLES

Senate:

— Does not include a provision allowing sponsorship of a same-sex partner.

Obama:

— Allows U.S. citizens and permanent residents to sponsor a visa for a same-sex partner.

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AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

Senate:

— Farm workers in the country illegally would have a quicker path to citizenship.

Obama:

— Farm workers in the country illegally would have the same path to citizenship.

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EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION

Senate:

— Create a nonforgeable electronic system for requiring prospective workers to demonstrate legal status and identity.

— Stiff fines and criminal penalties for employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

Obama:

— Create a fraud-resistant Social Security card and create nonforgeable documents for those without Social Security cards.

— Increase penalties for employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

— Over five years, phase in mandatory electronic employment verification, with exemptions for some small businesses.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/energy-environment/immigration-reform-similarities-and-differences-between-obama-senate-proposals/2013/01/29/4c4dd562-6a53-11e2-9a0b-db931670f35d_print.html