

No Executive Action on Immigration Overhaul for Now

By [Serena Marshall](#)

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President Obama has no plans to enact unilateral immigration overhaul by executive action, faith leaders from across the country said Obama told them today.

“We did not discuss the need; we did not bring up the issue of the president doing unilateral action,” Luis Cortes, president of Esperanza, a nonprofit law office serving immigrants, said at a news briefing after the Washington meeting.

“We felt it was more important that Congress take action at this time.”

Obama had asked the director of Homeland Security to look at ways to reduce the number of people deported for entering the United States without documentation. But White House press secretary Jay Carney says that is different from implementing immigration overhaul on his own.

The Department of Homeland Security is now performing a “review of practices and implantation of enforcement guidelines.” In other words, the administration is trying to obey the law and still rid the president of a title recently given him by Hispanic leaders, “Deporter in Chief.”

As for his changing immigration law, Carney said that is a nonstarter.

“I think the president believes that there is an opportunity that still exists for House Republicans to follow the lead of the Senate, including Republicans in the Senate, and take up and pass comprehensive immigration reform,” Carney said at today’s press briefing. “And today’s meeting that the president had with faith leaders demonstrates and reinforces the fact that there is a broad, unusually broad, coalition that supports that effort, that supports comprehensive immigration reform and all the benefits that making reform the law would provide to the country, to our security, to our economy, to our businesses.

“I think it highlights the isolation that House Republicans find themselves in when so many, not just politicians or advocacy leaders, but folks across the country support doing the right thing here and the irony, of course, is that there is a really strong conservative argument to be made on behalf of comprehensive immigration reform,” he said.

In a series of meetings in the past few months, Obama has met with immigration reform activists and leaders on the topic, hoping to gain their support to pressure House republicans into action.

Today’s meeting with religious leaders was in hopes of gaining their support and influence in pushing Republicans in the House to act.

“While the DACA action that was taken through executive order has been helpful, it was not the ultimate solution,” Noel Castellanos, CEO of the Christian Community Development Association, said of the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#). “We were here to talk about that ultimate solution ... we need to have Congress work.”

DACA is executive action by the president that affects so-called Dreamers, children who arrive in the United States without documentation, and allows them to stay without fear of deportation.

The six faith leaders who met with the president today emphasized the agreement on the issue of immigration overhaul.

“For the first time we have in this country the entire religious community, Muslim Jewish, Christian, Baha’i .. all the major denominations and churches and religious bodies of this country believe that it is a moral imperative that we get immigration reform done,” Cortes said. “It is the first and only political issue in this country where we all agree.”

During today’s meeting, the president stressed, according to a statement from the White House, “the importance of taking action to pass common sense immigration reform.”

“While his Administration can take steps to better enforce and administer immigration laws, nothing can replace the certainty of legislative reform and this permanent solution can only be achieved by Congress,” Obama emphasized, according to the statement.

Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission for the Southern Baptist Convention, said after the meeting, “I disagree with the president on many things, including life, marriage, religious liberty, HHS mandate; this is one of those issues that isn’t a red state, blue state divide.

“Most people agree, across the religious spectrum and across the political spectrum that our immigration system is broken so we need to have a system that respects the rule of law, secures the border and finds a way forward for this country.”

It has been more than nine months since the Senate passed its comprehensive immigration overhaul bill, and in that time the House has done little. It did release a set of immigration principles in January, but those seemed to stop at their introduction.

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