

Obama careful on immigration in State of the Union, lawmakers say

By Brian Bennett and Daniel Rothberg

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WASHINGTON -- President Obama urged Congress in his State of the Union speech to “fix our broken immigration system,” saying both political parties stood to gain by helping millions of undocumented immigrants get a legal foothold in America.

“Independent economists say immigration reform will grow our economy and shrink our deficits by almost \$1 trillion in the next two decades,” he said. “And for good reason: When people come here to fulfill their dreams – to study, invent and contribute to our culture – they make our country a more attractive place for businesses to locate and create jobs for everyone.”

But Obama, aware that House Republicans won’t appreciate any hectoring from him, didn’t set out any legislative markers, including requiring a pathway to legal status and ultimately citizenship for the estimated 11 million people in the country illegally.

Sen. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Obama was smart not to make specific demands of Republicans for immigration reform.

"To not get into the details -- it should be this, it should be that -- is smart," Schumer said.

Sen. Richard J. Durbin (D-Ill.) said he wasn't concerned that Obama did not mention a pathway to citizenship as a crucial part of any immigration overhaul.

"It's fine," Durbin said, adding that he believes such a pathway needs to be in a final immigration bill. "But I'm not going to rule out any possibilities. Let's at this point open up the conversation by the House taking action."

House Republicans plan to discuss their immigration proposals during the three-day GOP retreat on the Eastern Shore of Maryland starting Wednesday.

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), who helped craft an immigration bill that passed the Senate last June, said Obama was careful in his comments.

"He didn't spend a tremendous amount of time dwelling on it, but I think that is probably wise given the fact that there is still a debate going on about the right way to address it," Rubio said.

But Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.), a staunch opponent of easing immigration laws, said the immigration overhaul Obama advocated would add to unemployment in the country.

"You can't be for helping Americans unemployed and be for amnesty that's going to bring more illegal immigration to our country in the same speech," he said.

Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), another opponent, said a House debate on immigration "is only going to divide Republicans and unify Democrats."

"The best course of action is to say, 'We're not taking up immigration,'" King said. "We can't trust the president."

<http://www.latimes.com/nation/politics/politicsnow/la-pn-state-of-the-union-immigration-20140128,0,3776630.story>