

Obama and Rubio Immigration Plans: What's the Difference?

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Broad outlines describing how immigration reform could look in 2013 emerged this weekend. Officials from the White House spoke [to The New York Times](#) about possible tenets of reform while Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) elaborated on his vision in an interview [with the Wall Street Journal](#).

What's the difference between the Obama and Rubio plans? Here are some bullet points to get you up to speed:

What Obama Wants

Type of bill: Comprehensive. That will mean lots of immigration policy changes packaged into one piece of legislation, like the 2010 healthcare bill.

Citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants: The White House has said that it will reject any bill that doesn't include a pathway to citizenship for the millions of people in the country without papers. The path to citizenship would be earned, meaning immigrants would need to pay back taxes along with "other hurdles," according to The New York Times. The White House's [2011 blueprint for reform](#) says those other hurdles could involve criminal background checks, learning English and paying a processing fee.

Timeframe for citizenship: The most recent article by the Times didn't cover this, but Obama's 2011 blueprint shows a pathway that would take eight years to reach a green card and five additional years to earn citizenship.

Workplace enforcement: The president wants a national system to check the legal status of all workers. One such system, E-Verify, is already in place. Less than 10 percent of U.S. businesses use E-Verify but firms have [increasingly begun to use the program](#) in recent years. E-Verify has [drawn criticism](#) from immigrant rights and business groups for being unreliable and forcing employees further into the shadows.

Immigration backlogs: Getting a visa from certain countries, like the Philippines and Mexico, [can take decades](#), and leaders in sectors like farming, technology and healthcare say they need more immigrant workers. The president plans to add more visas to reduce the overall wait time to obtain one, according to The New York Times, but hasn't been specific about what he would do.

Guest worker program: One of the main reasons for illegal immigration is that there are no legal pathways that allow low-wage workers to come to the U.S. The president would like to create a guest-worker program to provide a way for those workers to enter the country legally.

What Rubio Wants

Type of bill: Piecemeal. Rubio told the Wall Street Journal that it would be better to have four or five separate immigration bills than one large legislative package. He cited the healthcare bill as an example of a big bill where bad policies got lost amid hundreds of pages. But on the piecemeal approach, he said, "it's not a line in the sand for me."

Citizenship for the 11 million undocumented: Rubio supports legal status for the undocumented, but he hasn't endorsed a special pathway to citizenship. The Journal calls his version of legal status "a form of temporary limbo." According to Rubio, immigrants should earn legal status through a process similar to Obama's approach to citizenship by paying back taxes, learning English and passing a background check. After that, they could apply for a green card and potentially pursue citizenship.

Timeframe for citizenship: Rubio wouldn't say how many years undocumented immigrants should have to wait for a green card, but he said it "would have to be long enough to ensure that it's not easier to do it this way than it would be the legal way." He added that the wait shouldn't be "indefinite," either.

Pathway for DREAMers: Rubio said he favors a faster pathway to citizenship for young undocumented immigrants who meet certain qualifications. Earlier this year, Rubio was developing an alternative to the DREAM Act, a bill that would offer citizenship to undocumented youth who attend college or serve in the military. Rubio's alternative would have granted DREAMers legal status but not citizenship. The senator's efforts became moot, however, when President Obama circumvented Congress and used his executive power this June to allow qualifying DREAMers to stay in the country and work legally.

Workplace enforcement: Workplace enforcement appears to be a point of common ground in both early outlines for reform. Like the White House, Rubio believes there should be a national system to verify that workers are here legally, whether that system be E-Verify or something else.

Immigration backlogs: Compared with the reports coming out of the White House, Rubio has put forward a more detailed explanation of how he would change the visa system. His main goal is to increase the number of visas for highly-skilled workers. There are two ways that can happen: either changing the distribution of visas -- to have more for skilled workers and less for family members -- or by upping the number of skilled-worker visas. Rubio said he prefers the second approach. "I don't think there's a lot of concern in this country that we'll somehow get overrun by Ph.D.s and entrepreneurs," Rubio told the Wall Street Journal.

Guest-worker program: Rubio also supports a guest-worker program, and he spoke to the Journal about how such a program would be particularly beneficial to farmers and farm workers. "The goal is to give American agriculture a reliable work force and to give protection to these workers as well," he said. "When someone is [undocumented] they're vulnerable to being exploited."

It's important to keep in mind that these are just the early outlines of reform. The White House, for instance, hasn't officially announced its plans (although reform could surface during the State of the Union address).

Meanwhile, a bipartisan group of congressmen dubbed the "Gang of Eight" are working on their own bill. The group, led by Senators Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), haven't gone public with what will be included in their legislation beyond the core commitment to an earned pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

Sen. Schumer assured The New York Times that despite other legislative pushes, immigration is still a top priority: "This is so important now to both parties that neither the fiscal cliff nor guns will get in the way."

http://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/obama-rubio-immigration-plans-difference/story?id=18212543