

Obama says he'd like to see immigration reform deal completed in first half of 2013

By Associated Press, Published: January 30

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama says he's looking for immigration reform to be completed within six months.

Obama said a deal should certainly be attainable this year, but he wants one even sooner. He said that politics, not technical issues, are standing in the way.

"I can guarantee that I will put everything I have behind it," Obama said in an interview with Telemundo, one of two he conducted Wednesday with Spanish-language television networks.

A group of senators, both Democrats and Republicans, has agreed on a framework for comprehensive immigration reform, including a path to citizenship for an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants already in the country. In the Republican-controlled House, another group of lawmakers is working on its own proposal.

Obama is promoting his own set of principles similar to those included in the Senate plan, but he has not been directly involved in the Senate's negotiations — perhaps a sign he recognizes that too much involvement by the Democratic president could make it harder for Republican lawmakers to sign on.

But Obama said he is open to meeting privately or publicly with members of either party, including Republican Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, a potential 2016 presidential candidate.

"I would be pleased to meet with anyone, anytime, anyplace," Obama said.

In a separate interview with Univision, Obama said the bill should make clear that a pathway to citizenship "is real and not just a fantasy for the future." Rubio is among lawmakers pushing for improvements on border security before citizenship would be granted, which has emerged as one likely sticking point between the Senate group and the White House. Obama said his administration has and will continue to take steps to tighten the border.

"What we don't want is to create some vague prospect in the future that somehow comprehensive immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship will happen, you know, manana," he said, using the Spanish word for "tomorrow." "We want to make sure that we're very clear that this legislation provides a real pathway."

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