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Obama Expresses Confidence in Early Action on Immigration

By [JULIA PRESTON](#)

With a parade of Republican leaders [coming forward in recent days in favor of comprehensive immigration legislation](#), [President Obama](#) said in [his first news conference since his re-election](#) that he was “very confident” he could pass a bill early in his second term.

“We need to seize the moment,” Mr. Obama said, clearly savoring the strong endorsement he received from Latino voters, who favored him by 71 percent to 27 percent over [Mitt Romney](#). The president said members of his staff had already started conversations with lawmakers in Congress, and he expected to see a bill introduced “very soon after my inauguration.”

Mr. Obama made clear he intends to push for broad-scope legislation that would include a program to give legal status to an estimated 11 million illegal immigrants in the country, including more than 1.2 million young immigrants brought here as children, who would be eligible under a separate bill known as the Dream Act. Mr. Obama said he also wanted to strengthen border security, punish employers who systematically hire unauthorized workers, and make visas available for farm workers and immigrants working in science and technology.

In a clue to where the president might be ready to compromise, Mr. Obama said he would offer the larger group of illegal immigrants “a path to legal status,” without saying it would lead to citizenship. Many Republicans who might support legalization next year have opposed it in the past, saying they feared it could unleash a surge of new immigration by family members of illegal immigrants who became citizens.

When Mr. Obama spoke of the young undocumented immigrants, however, he said, “We should give them every opportunity to earn their citizenship.”

Republican senators who have called this week for a new approach by the party to immigration legislation included [John McCain](#) of Arizona, [Lindsey Graham](#) of South Carolina and [Orrin G. Hatch](#) of Utah, all of whom have supported legalization in the past, and [Rand Paul](#) of Kentucky.

On Tuesday, a coalition of evangelical Christian leaders, including two Hispanic organizations, the Southern Baptists and the National Association of Evangelicals, called on the president to advance a comprehensive bill within the first 92 days of his new term, a figure they said recalled the number of times the Hebrew word for immigrant appears in the Bible.

The United States Catholic Bishops also called on Tuesday for “bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform” in 2013.

But it did not seem to augur well for the intense debate about immigration likely to come next year that Mr. Obama's flash of anger during the news conference was aimed at Mr. McCain and Mr. Graham, over their criticism of the [United Nations](#) ambassador, [Susan E. Rice](#), for comments concerning the killings of Americans in Libya.

Although the speaker of the House of Representatives, [John A. Boehner](#), said last week he was ready to take up immigration in 2013, legalization will most likely be a hard sell in the House, where many Republicans view it as amnesty for lawbreakers.

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