

Obama Weighing Business-Friendly Immigration Actions

Executive Orders Would Be Part of Broader Review of Procedures

By Laura Meckler

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WASHINGTON—The White House is considering changes to immigration policy aimed at helping businesses, part of a broad review of procedures that also is likely to provide new protections for people now in the country illegally.

President [Barack Obama](#) soon after Labor Day is expected to announce executive actions to refine deportation priorities and to potentially expand a program that gives safe harbor and work permits to qualifying illegal immigrants. But the White House also is reviewing actions on issues that are priorities for businesses, according to administration and other officials, an effort that has received less notice. Businesses are mostly concerned with legal-immigration policy.

During more than 20 meetings this summer, senior White House and administration officials have heard ideas from business and other groups on changes that Mr. Obama could accomplish through executive powers. Mr. Obama started the review after broad legislation to overhaul immigration law died in the House of Representatives.

"The president has not made a decision regarding next steps, but he believes it's important to understand and consider the full range of perspectives on potential solutions," White House spokesman Shawn Turner said by email on Monday.

High-tech businesses are pushing for several changes in how immigration law is interpreted. One proposal would have the administration exclude dependents from the numerical cap on employment-based green cards, which is now 140,000 a year. The change could, in effect, double the number of green cards available.

Under current law, if a worker receives a green card, his or her spouse may also qualify, but both people are counted under the 140,000 annual cap

A second proposal would "recapture" unused employment green cards from previous years, which could produce more than 200,000 new green cards, according to high-tech lobbyists and a document outlining proposals from Compete America, a coalition of high-tech companies.

"We have thousands of employees waiting for green cards. It is a hardship for them," said Peter Muller, director for immigration policy for Intel Corp., who participated in one of the White House meetings.

The Compete America document expresses some doubt that the administration has the authority to change the policies. For example, it says, excluding dependents from the cap on green cards would be a "marked departure" from how federal officials have interpreted the law.

Already, Sen. Jeff Sessions (R., Ala.) has been rallying opposition on a regular basis to Mr. Obama's possible executive action. Monday, he said that businesses were "scheming with the White House to extract by executive fiat what was denied to them by the American people and Congress."

One farm lobbyist said the agricultural industry isn't pushing for aggressive administrative action, fearing that doing so would anger Republicans and poison the chance of more-lasting congressional action. "Without any guarantee of true stability, it's hard for us to go out there on a limb," this person said.

At a White House meeting this month, agriculture interests asked the administration for more flexibility for farm workers, a person at the meeting said. In addition, Kristi Boswell, director of congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau, said her group wants the administration to back off on enforcement actions aimed at finding illegal workers that cause "instability" in the industry.

Alberto P. Cardenas Jr. , a Houston attorney who attended this month's meeting, said construction clients of his pressed administration officials to make sure any undocumented immigrants who are given new work permits are required to work for legitimate companies that follow the law and pay taxes.

Today, he said, many undocumented workers operate in the underground, cash-based economy that unfairly undercuts his clients' businesses.

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