

Mitt Romney would honor deportation exemptions issued to young illegal immigrants under President Obama's executive action but would not grant new ones

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By Callum Borchers, Globe Correspondent

Mitt Romney would not revoke temporary deportation exemptions granted to young illegal immigrants under an executive action by President Obama, but he also would not issue new protective documents if elected.

“The people who have received the special visa that the president has put in place, which is a two-year visa, should expect that the visa would continue to be valid,” Romney [told the Denver Post](#) in an interview published Tuesday, a day ahead of the first presidential debate of the general election, which will be held in that city and cover domestic policy, possibly including immigration.

Technically, the undocumented immigrants Romney described have not received visas; their illegal status has not changed, but they have been granted temporary reprieves from deportation.

Responding to a Globe request to clarify Romney's statement to the Denver Post, Romney's campaign said he would honor deportation exemptions issued by the Obama administration before his inauguration but would not grant new ones after taking office.

That means the number of people who would benefit from Romney's non-reversal could be minute. In the first month since Obama's order took effect, only 29 deportation exemptions have been issued, [according to US Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) .

“Mitt Romney has made it clear: He would not continue the administration's policy that provides temporary reprieve from deportation for young people who were brought here through no fault of their own,” said Gabriela Domenzain, the Obama campaign's director of Hispanic press. “This is unacceptable and just another example of how he is the most extreme presidential candidate on immigration in modern history.”

In June, Obama directed the Department of Homeland Security to stop deporting some undocumented immigrants: people with clean criminal records who are younger than 30 and entered the US before age 16, who have lived here for at least five years and are enrolled in high school, hold high school diplomas or are military veterans in good standing. These immigrants can apply for two-year deportation reprieves to remain in the United States.

The eligibility requirements outlined by Obama closely resemble those in the DREAM Act, a long-stalled bill that would put young illegal immigrants on a pathway to citizenship. Many Republicans, including Romney, oppose the DREAM Act.

Romney quickly blasted the president's move as a political ploy and an inadequate congressional end-around.

"What the president did -- he should have worked on this years ago," Romney said in an interview with CBS News two days after Obama gave the order. "If he felt seriously about this, he should have taken action when he had a Democrat House and Senate. But he didn't. He saves these things for four-and-a-half months before the general election."

In the same interview, Romney declined to say whether he would leave Obama's order in place.

"We'll look at that setting as we reach that, but my anticipation is I'd come into office and say, 'We need to get this done on a long-term basis, not this kind of stop-gap measure,'" Romney said.

Romney's newly stated position means young undocumented immigrants have a five-month window -- now partly closed -- to receive deportation reprieves under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, if Romney is elected. The program began on Aug. 15, and Romney would be inaugurated on Jan. 20.

Through Sept. 13, the most recent date for which data are available, more than 82,000 applications had been filed but only 29 exemptions had been issued. Just 1,660 requests were ready for review by immigration officials.

Illegal immigrants who did not receive exemptions by Romney's inauguration could face deportation, though Romney has said repeatedly that he has no plan to "round up" undocumented immigrants for deportation. He also told the Denver Post that by the time exemption recipients' documents expire, "we will have the full immigration reform plan that I've proposed."

Romney has proposed stronger border security, including completion of a fence along the Mexican border, and mandatory verification of a prospective employee's right to work in the United States.

He also supports green cards for illegal immigrants who serve in the military and for foreign students who earn advanced degrees in math, science and engineering at American universities.

At a forum hosted by the Spanish-language network Univision last month in Miami, Romney pledged to work across the aisle to forge a permanent solution for young undocumented immigrants.

"These kids deserve something better than temporary," Romney said.

<http://www.boston.com/politicalintelligence/2012/10/02/mitt-romney-would-preserve-president-obama-executive-order-protecting-young-illegal-immigrants-from-deportation/2Pmn9UxDli78jmFMGHBbSM/story.html>