

White House wants delay in DoD immigration plan

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- The White House has asked the Department of Defense to delay a plan that would allow some immigrants who entered the U.S. illegally as children to obtain a limited path to citizenship by serving in the military.

The decision to postpone the narrowly drawn proposal is part of the White House effort to put off any immigration-related executive actions until August in the hope that House Republicans act on legislation to overhaul the immigration system in the next two months.

White House officials have said they don't want to hurt those chances by taking executive branch actions that would anger congressional Republicans. The Senate has already passed broad immigration legislation.

"The president is convinced there is a legislative opportunity, and that gives us the best opportunity to fix what's broken in our immigration system," White House spokesman Bobby Whithorne said Monday. "He wants to leave no stone unturned to make sure the House takes that opportunity, follows the Senate's lead and takes action."

The plan under consideration by the Pentagon would apply to immigrants who arrived illegally as children but already have received work permits and relief from deportation under a program President Barack Obama announced two years ago, called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA. More than 500,000 immigrants have benefited from the program.

The Pentagon proposal would permit military service by immigrants who don't have legal status if they meet criteria under the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program. The program allows military service by non-citizens who have language or medical skills. As a result, the proposal would likely only affect a small portion of the immigrants who have benefited from DACA.

Last month, House Republican leaders blocked any votes on immigration legislation that could have been attached to a broader defense policy bill, including one measure that would have offered citizenship to immigrants in the U.S. illegally who serve in the military. That proposal had been introduced by Republican Rep. Jeff Denham of California. It had 26 Democrat and 24 Republican co-sponsors. But it was staunchly opposed by a minority of Republicans.

The delay sought by the White House was first reported by The New York Times.

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