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## DEMONSTRATORS RALLY FOR PASSAGE OF IMMIGRATION OVERHAUL

By Miriam Jordan  
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Demonstrators rallied across the U.S. on Saturday to pressure Congress and President Barack Obama to pass an immigration overhaul, in what organizers billed as the opening chapter in a new campaign to revive stalled legislation.

In California, Gov. Jerry Brown signed several bills to enhance school, workplace and civil protections for immigrants in his state. "While Washington waffles, California's forging ahead," the governor said. "I'm not waiting."

Spirited, peaceful marches occurred in more than 90 cities across the country, from Boston and New York to Los Angeles and Phoenix.

Organizers, from faith, labor and civil-rights groups, dubbed the demonstrations a "National Day for Dignity and Respect." The marches are a prelude to a rally and concert planned for Tuesday on the National Mall in Washington, which organizers hope will draw tens of thousands.

The U.S. is home to nearly 12 million immigrants who lack legal status, a group that has been spreading since the '90s from traditional gateway states, like California, Texas and Arizona to states like Georgia, North Carolina and Massachusetts.

In Los Angeles, home to the largest undocumented population of any city, hundreds gathered in Hollywood for a rally in which pastors, rabbis and union leaders energized the crowd waving American flags and banners calling for an immigration overhaul.

A "March of Stars" after the rally attracted about 15,000 people, organizers said. "Hey-hey, ho-ho deportations have to got to go!" and "Here we are and here we stay," were among the slogans that marchers chanted in English and Spanish.

Church leader Ricardo Moreno, who wore a brown t-shirt that read "Presbyterians for Just Immigration," said buses had transported hundreds of people to Hollywood from southern California towns.

Victor Ramirez, a Mexican who has lived in the U.S. for 19 years, said he had recently passed a real-estate exam but couldn't get his license because he is undocumented. "I can get ahead if I get my green card," or legal status, he said.

Several national groups said they are gearing up for sustained escalation, which will include acts of civil disobedience, to pressure the House GOP to get on board with an overhaul.

Among them is United We Dream, which represents young undocumented immigrants who have benefited from an Obama administration policy that has given them a reprieve from deportation and a temporary work permit. These immigrants, who typically grew up in the U.S. and speak unaccented English, have been influential actors in the fight for a new immigration policy.

Other groups are shifting their focus from Republicans to President Obama.

"Time is running out for any reform," said Arturo Carmona, executive director of presente.org, a Los Angeles-based advocacy group. "The movement isn't just focusing on bad Republicans . . . We are going to challenge the president."

Despite the surge in activism, the likelihood is slim that Congress will pass any new immigration policy before the year's end. Immigration has taken a back seat to international issues, like Syria, and domestic issues, including the budget standoff.

The Senate passed a bipartisan immigration bill in June. But many House Republicans are disinclined to address the controversial yet central issue of whether to confer citizenship to those legalized. House Democrats unveiled an immigration bill last Wednesday that combines an extended path to citizenship with stepped-up border security; it is unlikely to win GOP support.

In California, the governor sent a message to Congress by signing a spate of immigration-related bills. One of them restricts the ability of law enforcement to detain undocumented immigrants for transfer to federal authorities unless the immigrants committed a serious offense.

The so-called Trust Act is the second major immigration bill signed by the Democratic governor in a matter of days. On Thursday, Gov. Brown approved a measure that allows undocumented immigrants to get a California driver's license.