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FOR PRESIDENT OBAMA, GOING IT ALONE HAS ITS RISKS

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With time ticking down on his second term, President Barack Obama has escalated his efforts to accomplish his policy goals without winning approval from Congress, a strategy that may produce results quickly but with the risk that they may be undone by lawmakers or a future president.

The latest example was Mr. Obama's policy, announced Thursday, of shielding more than four million illegal immigrants from deportation. Mr. Obama also has announced an aggressive climate deal with China, presided over an Environmental Protection Agency plan to order carbon-emission cuts at power plants and pursued nuclear negotiations with Iran.

Moreover, the White House has been exploring options intended to allow the president to close the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay without Congress's approval.

The president long has promised to press ahead on his agenda with or without lawmakers' support, but the new actions are far more sweeping in scope than the moves he made earlier this year to, for example, raise the minimum wage for federal contractors.

With prospects uncertain for passing major legislation in the new, Republican-controlled Congress, Mr. Obama has begun to build a second-term legacy that is likely to be defined in large part by unilateral action.

The strategy, however, comes with risks. Republican lawmakers have raised the specter of trying to undo the president's actions, and a future president potentially could reverse some of Mr. Obama's moves on immigration and climate change.

More immediately, the president's decision to sidestep lawmakers could diminish the chances of forging agreements with Republican leaders on other issues.

GOP lawmakers warned that Mr. Obama would "poison the well" by acting unilaterally on immigration.

"We've stopped having a constitutional system of checks and balances that's protected our liberty," Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) said Sunday on Fox. "It's the power of a monarch or an emperor." He suggested that Republicans in the Senate respond to the president's actions on immigration by blocking his nominees.

In an interview that aired Sunday on ABC, Mr. Obama said: "What the American people expect is that if we disagree on one thing . . . then we work on everything else."

Suggesting that the legislative process wasn't at an end, some Republicans said the party should respond to Mr. Obama by taking the reins on policy and passing GOP-sponsored immigration bills, though it remained unclear what policy the party would put forward and whether Mr. Obama would sign on.

"It's incumbent on Republicans to come up with our own agenda, a positive, constructive agenda," said Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX) on CBS on Sunday. Mr. McCaul, who leads the

House Homeland Security Committee, said such an effort likely would lead with a border-security bill, but noted that Congress wouldn't take up the issue until next year.

Mr. Obama said in the interview that both Republican and Democratic presidents have taken similar executive actions.

"The history is that I have issued fewer executive actions than most of my predecessors, by a longshot," he said. "Take a look at the track records of the modern presidency; I've actually been very restrained. And I've been very restrained with respect to immigration."

The first two years of Mr. Obama's second term yielded few legislative victories and little progress on the White House's top goals, such as raising the minimum wage and enacting comprehensive immigration legislation.

Mr. Obama largely was sidelined during this fall's campaigns, and Republicans cast Democratic defeats in the midterm elections as a rejection of the president's policies.

The White House has resolved to push forward on Mr. Obama's agenda during the remaining two years.

"He does feel the pressure of time," Dan Pfeiffer, an Obama senior adviser, said Friday at a breakfast sponsored by the Christian Science Monitor. "We all do."

On both immigration and climate change, the president tried but failed to work with Congress to pass legislation before acting on his own. In addition to striking a deal with China to cut carbon pollution, Mr. Obama has laid out aggressive limits on power-plant emissions, another unilateral move that could stand as one of the more far-reaching actions of the second term.

William Galston, a former policy adviser to President Bill Clinton, said acting on immigration and climate change always have been priorities for Mr. Obama, but they have risen in importance as legislative avenues have been closed off.

"Things that you can get done through executive decisions look much more attractive in highly polarized circumstances," said Mr. Galston, who is now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

White House officials also see a range of opportunities to define the president's second term in the foreign-policy realm.

The Obama administration has continued to press for an agreement with Iran on its nuclear program, despite skepticism in Congress. Some Republican lawmakers have suggested that they would move to impose more sanctions on Iran if they aren't comfortable with a deal. Mr. Obama said in the ABC interview that he remained confident that if an agreement is reached, he could convince Congress it is the right thing to do.

Mr. Obama also appears determined to make good on a campaign promise to close the detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba – another potentially dramatic use of executive power. The White House has discussed ways to override a congressional ban on bringing detainees to the U.S., senior administration officials have said.

While the president has said he wants to work with Congress, he and his advisers recently have struck a more defiant tone about Mr. Obama's powers to act on his own. Mr. Obama

has said he has an answer for lawmakers who question his authority on immigration: "Nobody is stopping them from passing a bill."

John Podesta, counselor to the president, predicted that Republicans who want to undo the president's power-plant rules would fail, saying, "I don't believe they can stop us from doing that."

Such statements have fanned discord between the White House and the GOP. But on Sunday, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) placed blame on both his party and the president, saying "shame on us as Republicans" for failing to pass legislation to overhaul the immigration system.

"My party has failed," he said on CNN. "This president has failed miserably, and he's made it worse."