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OBAMA SAYS HE'S FRUSTRATED WITH IMMIGRATION IMPASSE

By Jeffrey Sparshott
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President Barack Obama on Thursday told Hispanic lawmakers and community leaders he shares their frustration on stalled plans to reform the U.S. immigration policy, and promised to take steps to on his own to fix a "broken" system before the end of the year.

"If anybody wants to know where my heart is or whether I want to have this fight, let me put those questions to rest right now," Mr. Obama said at a Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute gala. "I am not going to give up this fight until it gets done."

Mr. Obama last month said he would put off executive action on immigration until after the midterm elections, breaking a promise to act by summer's end and disappointing reform advocates.

On Thursday, while being heckled by a protester, he pledged to act on his own between the November election and the end of this year.

Mr. Obama made immigration reform a priority for his second term but wasn't able to reach a compromise with House Republicans on stepped-up border enforcement and other plans to overhaul the system. Any hope of a deal broke down completely in June when the U.S.-Mexico border became a flash point amid a wave of unaccompanied minors – largely from Central America – entering the country.

At the time, House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) blamed the president for the House's inaction, saying lawmakers "don't trust him to enforce the law as written."

On Thursday, the president again blamed the House. "I've said before that if Congress failed to live up to its responsibilities to solve this problem, I would act to fix as much of our immigration system as I can on my own and I meant what I said," Mr. Obama said. "So this is not a question of if, but when."

The president in June had pledged to take executive action by summer's end but put off any moves amid grumbling among some Senate Democrats that the issue could cost them the election. He has been expected to ratchet back deportations, possibly offer work permits to people in the U.S. illegally and produce more legal visas for people seeking to work in the U.S.

Now, Mr. Obama said he plans to build support for his efforts by making a case that immigration reform is good for the U.S. economy.

"For any action to last, for it to be effective and extend beyond my administration – 'cause I'm only here two more years – we're going to have to build more support of the American people so it is sustainable and lasting," he said.