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## OBAMA'S IMMIGRATION PLAN TAKES SHAPE

By Laura Meckler and Kristina Peterson  
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President Barack Obama will lay out sweeping changes to the immigration system in a speech Thursday night, offering new protections to millions of people in the country illegally and sparking a bitter fight with Republicans.

The executive action is expected to shield as many as five million illegal immigrants from deportation and offer them a chance for work permits, while overhauling the enforcement system and boosting border security, people briefed on the plan said. It would represent the most significant changes to U.S. immigration policy in nearly three decades, though it would fall far short of the comprehensive legislation supporters have been trying to pass since the George W. Bush administration.

GOP reaction was swift and sharply negative, with Republicans saying the president is overstepping his authority, refusing to work with Congress and ignoring the will of voters, who this month delivered the GOP control of both houses of Congress. The White House cast the issue as an urgent policy priority.

"Everybody agrees that our immigration system is broken. Unfortunately, Washington has allowed the problem to fester for too long," Mr. Obama said in a video released on the White House's Facebook page Wednesday afternoon. He said he would use his authority to "make the system work better."

Republicans are split over how to respond to President Obama's plan to unilaterally change the immigration system. WSJ's Laura Meckler and Simon Constable discuss. Photo: Getty  
The moves, and the GOP response, will likely extinguish an already dim chance of legislative action on immigration. Republican leaders, buoyed by their Senate win and stronger hold on the House after the midterms, warned that cooperation on other matters would be more difficult, as well.

"Sticking your finger in the eye of a recently elected Republican Congress is about as bad a way as I can think of to start off the last two years of what could be a productive term," said Sen. Lamar Alexander (R., Tenn.).

As an executive action, Mr. Obama's policy could be overturned by a future president, though it could prove politically complicated to strip people of protected status once they have it.

Republicans were debating among themselves how to counter the president's move. Some GOP lawmakers were pushing leaders to write limits on Mr. Obama into legislation that must pass by Dec. 11 to keep the government funded – a course sure to draw a presidential veto threat and raise the prospect of a partial government shutdown. Others in the GOP counseled a less confrontational path.

Options being discussed include passing GOP-stamped immigration bills, passing stand-alone legislation next year to block Mr. Obama's action and filing suit against the president, hoping a judge would intervene.

Mr. Obama is scheduled to lay out his policy in a speech to the nation Thursday at 8 p.m. EST, and then on Friday at a Las Vegas high school. It is the same school where the president, in a speech in early 2013, laid out principles for immigration legislation that later passed the Democrat-led Senate but died in the GOP-controlled House.

Mr. Obama got immediate backup from his party. "We have waited long enough for House Republicans. Since they won't act, the president should, and he will," Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D., Nev.) said on the Senate floor Wednesday.

Under the new policy, undocumented parents of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents who have been in the U.S. for at least five years would win a temporary stay of deportation and be eligible for work permits, according to several people briefed, including several Democratic lawmakers briefed by Mr. Obama over dinner Wednesday at the White House.

Rep. Joe Crowley (D., N.Y.), one of those briefed, said that the new policy is expected to benefit between 4 million and 5 million undocumented residents. Another congressman at the dinner said the figure would approach 5 million. Another person familiar with the plan said about 4 million would be eligible because of their family ties and longevity, and up to a million more through other provisions.

Rep. Ben Ray Lujan (D., N.M.) said that to be eligible, people will have to undergo a background check, pay any back taxes and go through an application process. He added that the plan will also include stepped up border security.

The president is also expected to expand eligibility for a 2012 program that gives safe harbor from deportation to young people brought into the U.S. illegally as children, for instance by increasing the age limit for participation, people briefed on the plan said. This group, sometimes called Dreamers, has pressed Mr. Obama to use executive authority to protect illegal immigrants. But Mr. Obama wasn't expected to extend protections to their parents, their top policy goal.

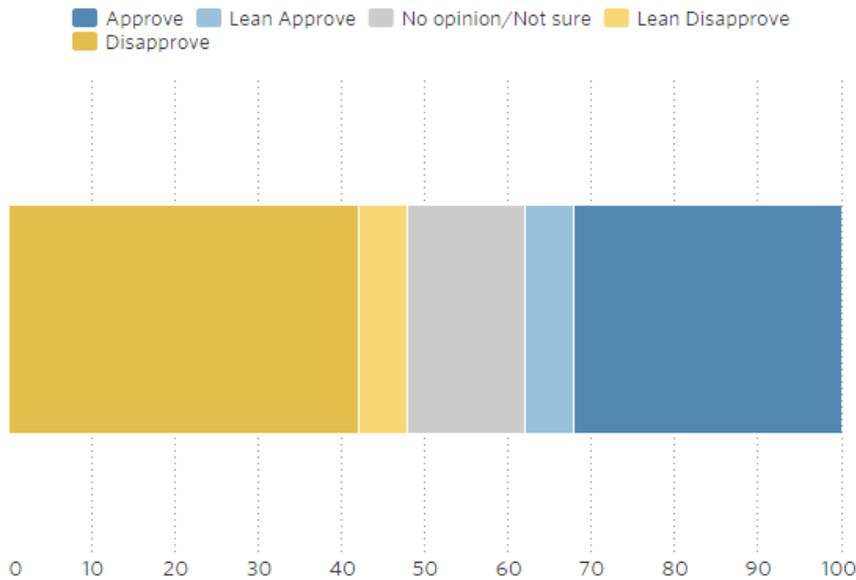
Asked about the exclusion of Dreamer parents, Rep. Lujan said, "The president is taking the action he is able to. This is a first step."

Mr. Obama told lawmakers that he didn't want to halt his plans because some Republicans have raised the possibility of another government shutdown.

"We're not running away from this because of the artificial deadlines that have been set up," Mr. Crowley said, explaining the president's position.

The plan is also set to reorder immigration-enforcement priorities and revamp or replace the Secure Communities program, which uses local law enforcement to identify undocumented immigrants, one person briefed said. The person said it would also include a provision sought by businesses that would make it easier for students awaiting work visas to stay in the U.S.

## Weak Support for Executive Action



Source: WSJ/NBC News poll  
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The Wall Street Journal

The United Farm Workers estimated that at least 250,000 farm workers would be protected from deportation under criteria laid out for the union president, Arturo Rodriguez, in a meeting with Mr. Obama on Wednesday. The union estimates that there are about a million undocumented farm workers in the U.S., though others put it lower.

One provision sought by businesses, particularly high-tech companies, isn't in Mr. Obama's package, several people said. It would have made available employment visas that were unused in previous years.

A new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll, released Wednesday, found the president facing headwinds in laying out his policy, though public support for legalization of undocumented immigrants remains high.

The survey found 48% of Americans disapprove of Mr. Obama's acting without Congress on immigration, while 38% approve. Even among Latinos, who overwhelmingly favor legalization for undocumented immigrants, 43% say they approved of Mr. Obama acting alone, while 37% didn't.

Support for a pathway to citizenship for those in the U.S. illegally remained robust, with 57% of respondents favoring such a plan and 40% opposing. Support grew to 74% when people were given likely details of such a plan, including requirements illegal immigrants pay a fine and back taxes, and pass a security background check before qualifying for legal status.

"The public wants this policy," said Fred Yang, a Democratic pollster who co-directs the survey. "That doesn't mean they'll be happy with how it might get done."

Mr. Obama's course presents risks to both parties. For Mr. Obama, areas of agreement with Republicans in the remainder of his term – such as trade promotion and an overhaul of the corporate tax code – are sure to be more difficult, given the acrimony. Some Senate Republicans said they would be less inclined to approve his nominees.

Rep. Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) warned in an interview that Mr. Obama's action would make agreement on a tax overhaul less likely. It "would definitely hurt, that's for sure," he said.

Other Republicans worried an overheated response could backfire on the GOP. They said the party must show it can effectively govern – a challenge, given that some in the party are urging a budget showdown to protest Mr. Obama's plan. Others said the debate threatened efforts to improve the party's shaky standing with the growing bloc of Hispanic voters.

"We're going to have to control our response," said Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.). He said it was important that his party keep its criticism focused on perceived executive overreach and that Republicans not allow themselves to be cast as opposing immigration or immigrants.

"I'm very concerned that there will be loud voices in our party who have been complete demagogues on immigration, who have no solution, and people in my party will cater to them," Mr. Graham said.

And Sen. Orrin Hatch (R., Utah) said the responsibility for addressing immigration falls on both parties. "We need to get off our duffs and solve this problem."

News of the president's immigration plan reinforced a growing sense of partisan acrimony in Congress.

On Tuesday, the Senate narrowly defeated legislation approving the Keystone XL pipeline. The Senate then failed to advance a bill overhauling a National Security Agency program, likely ending efforts to address surveillance concerns this year.

The most immediate impact of the dispute will be on government funding after Dec. 11. Lawmakers in both chambers have been working on omnibus legislation tying together 12 tailored spending bills that would fund the government through September 2015, the end of the fiscal year. But GOP anger over the immigration action makes it harder to pass ambitious spending policy and more likely that Congress will simply extend the government's current funding levels into early 2015, said lawmakers and aides.

One route Republicans may pursue is to fund almost all of the government through September 2015, but extend funding just until early next year for the agencies or programs that Mr. Obama would need to implement the executive action. Other options include passing Republican immigration bills, such as one beefing up border security, after the new Congress is sworn in.

"We've been trying to figure out what leverage we have, and we're finding it difficult to actually stop the president here in the next two months," said Rep. Marlin Stutzman (R., Ind.). "We should pass our own immigration bills – respond with conservative immigration policy that Republicans agree on."