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WHITE HOUSE SAYS CONGRESS MUST ACCEPT ITS TERMS ON IMMIGRATION

Chief of Staff John Kelly says he doubts the administration would extend the 'Dreamers' program beyond March 5 without a legislative fix

By Laura Meckler and Michael C. Bender
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The White House signaled little flexibility on immigration on Tuesday, saying lawmakers must pass a bill on President Donald Trump's terms and offering no relief on the tight timeline for Congress.

White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, who has been a key adviser to Mr. Trump on immigration, said he wouldn't support Congress passing a short-term legislative patch to give itself more time on a broader immigration bill. He said he would counsel Mr. Trump to oppose any such effort.

"What makes them act is pressure," he told reporters, referring to Congress. "I would certainly advise against it."

Mr. Kelly also said he doubts the Trump administration will extend a program protecting young undocumented immigrants beyond March 5, if lawmakers fail to agree on a legislative replacement by that deadline. Mr. Trump has previously said he was open to an extension of the program he ended last year, depending on the circumstances.

In his own comments later in the day, Mr. Trump also struck a tough tone on immigration, saying he welcomes a government shutdown if that is what it takes to get tougher border measures in place.

"I'd love to see a shutdown if we can't get this stuff taken care of," Mr. Trump said at a White House meeting.

In exchange for protections for young undocumented immigrants, Mr. Trump has insisted on \$25 billion in border security and wall funding, new limits on family migration, an end to the diversity visa lottery and other changes in immigration law.

With his comments Tuesday, Mr. Trump appeared eager for a high-profile fight, but his words were out of sync with the current state of play on Capitol Hill. Democrats are no longer threatening a government shutdown over immigration, as they did last month, and a two-year spending agreement appears to be at hand.

Democrats now appear willing to separate the spending issues from the immigration fight, which centers on young people brought to the U.S. as children. These children, called Dreamers, had been protected from deportation under the Obama -era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. DACA protections begin expiring in large numbers on March 5.

The Senate is expected to debate immigration legislation next week, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) said he would structure the debate in a way that is "fair to everyone." Any proposal will need backing from 60 senators to advance in the chamber.

"Whoever gets to 60, wins. And it will be an opportunity for 1,000 flowers to bloom," Mr. McConnell said Tuesday.

Lawmakers have been unable to reach a broad, bipartisan agreement on the matter and some have discussed a fallback that would extend a legal status for the 690,000 DACA participants for the short term, giving Congress more time.

"I'm becoming increasingly pessimistic about immigration," Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) told reporters Tuesday. He said the best-case scenario might be a temporary legal status for DACA recipients and some border security. "It's just too many moving parts."

Some Democrats said they were alarmed at the idea of Congress doing nothing more than a one-year extension of the DACA program, which they said would provide little certainty to Dreamers.

"That would be devastating in the long run in terms of getting a permanent solution for this," said Rep. Raul Grijalva (D., Ariz.).

Visiting the Capitol on Tuesday, Mr. Kelly cast Mr. Trump's immigration proposal as a generous offer that Democrats should jump on. He noted that it would offer a path to citizenship for the 1.8 million people eligible for DACA, not just the 690,000 who enrolled. But he spoke harshly about those who didn't register.

"The difference between 690 and 1.8 million were the people that some would say were too afraid to sign up, others would say are too lazy to get off their asses, but they didn't sign up," he said.

"I'm sorry for that characterization. It doesn't surprise me from Gen. Kelly," said Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin (D., Ill.) afterward. "Many of them were afraid to register even under President Obama, for fear of some different president, some different administration would use the reported information against them and their families."

Mr. Kelly also said he "would doubt very much" that the administration would extend DACA protections beyond March 5.

Mr. Trump has said he is open to extending that deadline, including once in Mr. Kelly's office as his chief of staff met with White House reporters.

"I'm not guaranteeing it...but I certainly have the right to do it," Mr. Trump said Jan. 24, when asked if he would consider pushing back the deadline.