

The New York Times

OBAMA ISSUES CALL FOR IMMIGRATION OVERHAUL

By Mark Landler
January 29, 2013

LAS VEGAS – President Obama called on Congress, in a speech here Tuesday, to advance an immigration overhaul that includes a plan “that finally deals with the 11 million undocumented immigrants who are in this country right now.”

In remarks billed as a major address on immigration policy, the president also welcomed bipartisan movement in Congress on the politically charged issue, which has defied solution in recent years.

“The good news is that – for the first time in many years – Republicans and Democrats seem ready to tackle this problem together,” Mr. Obama said. “Members of both parties, in both chambers, are actively working on a solution. And yesterday, a bipartisan group of senators announced their principles for comprehensive immigration reform, which are very much in line with the principles I’ve proposed and campaigned on for the last few years. At this moment, it looks like there’s a genuine desire to get this done soon. And that’s very encouraging.”

What to do about the millions of undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States has split earlier efforts at broad immigration changes as lawmakers have resisted steps that could be seen as rewarding those who came to the country illegally.

Mr. Obama differs with the blueprint offered by a bipartisan group of senators on some key issues, notably whether to make a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants conditional on further tightening the nation’s borders.

But administration officials said Monday evening that the principles in the Senate proposal were largely consistent with those in Mr. Obama’s 29-page blueprint for immigration reform, which he issued in May 2011 and made a plank of his re-election campaign.

With the senators pledging to pass a bill by this summer, the White House has shelved, for now, plans to introduce its own immigration bill, the officials said. Indeed, after two years of nearly constant feuding with Congress, Mr. Obama finds himself in rare alignment with Democratic and Republican lawmakers on a major issue.

Administration officials said that in contrast with the Senate framework, the president will call for immigration benefits to be extended to same-sex couples when one person is an American.

House Republicans are expected to oppose that provision and also resist the concept of offering a path to citizenship for illegal immigrants, though there was talk on Monday of attempts to find a bipartisan approach in the House as well.

The president’s choice of Nevada as the locale for the speech underlines the political threat that immigration poses to Republicans. Mr. Obama beat his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney, by more than six percentage points in the state, though Nevada’s economy was devastated by the housing collapse. A key factor in the president’s victory was a surge of support from Hispanics.