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OBAMA SAYS IMMIGRATION MUST BE CONSIDERED AS PACKAGE

By Jared A. Favole
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WASHINGTON—President Barack Obama on Tuesday said overhauling the immigration system should be considered as a complete package in Congress, which is at odds with how House Republicans want to approach immigration legislation, and said it didn't make sense to try to change the system without giving illegal immigrants a path to citizenship.

"The danger of doing it in pieces is that a lot of groups want different things," Mr. Obama said in an interview with affiliates of the Spanish-language news station Telemundo. He likened breaking up immigration system in pieces to trying to get his children to eat food they don't like, saying "If you've eaten your dessert before you've eaten your meal, at least with my children, sometimes they don't end up eating their vegetables."

The president's interview with affiliates of Telemundo, and other interviews he granted Tuesday to affiliates of rival Univision, are part of the White House's approach to get the president to play a more visible role in the immigration debate. The interviews contrast with his more recent behind-the-scenes approach to the immigration debate, and could prove risky if he uses rhetoric that inflames Republicans wary of granting citizenship to illegal immigrants. White House officials have said the president may consider traveling to states with a strong Latino presence to help push the debate forward.

House Republicans have settled on taking the immigration issue in pieces rather than vote on the comprehensive legislation passed by the Senate. Doing so means the issue won't be solved likely until fall at the earliest, and could allow them to avoid granting a pathway to citizenship to illegal immigrants while still making changes to the system.

Mr. Obama rejected suggestions that the system could be overhauled without giving a pathway to illegal immigrants already here. "It does not make sense to me, if we're gonna make this once-in-a-generation effort to finally fix the system, to leave the status of 11 million people or so unresolved, and certainly for us to have two classes of people in this country, full citizens, and people who are permanently resigned to a lower status," he said.

Lawmakers of both parties who helped craft immigration legislation that passed the Senate have said they want Mr. Obama to play an active role in the debate. Sens. John McCain (R., Ariz.) and Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.), both members of the Senate "Gang of Eight" that helped win passage of the bill in the Senate, met with Mr. Obama at the White House last week to discuss immigration.

They said they wanted Mr. Obama to push the debate but avoid partisan rhetoric that could force Republicans to reject the legislation. "I would just remind you that the challenge here is to get Republican members on board as we shape a solution, so we want to be very careful that ... Republican House members in the districts that they've represented a long time do not feel that they're being pressured by the president of the United States," Mr. McCain said after meeting with the president.