

President-Elect Obama's Position on U.S. Immigration

On November 4th, our country earned the chance to affect the change we seek in comprehensive U.S. immigration reform. What may we hope for, and expect from, our new President and his administration? If he can convert his position into effective policy, we should expect a great deal.

President-elect Barack Obama favors an immigration reform plan that allows illegal immigrants “who are in good standing to pay a fine, learn English, not violate the law, and go to the back of the line for the opportunity to become citizens” (according to his campaign's immigration fact sheet). Obama has also called for sweeping amnesty for illegal immigrants.

Obama proposed three amendments that were included in the U.S. Senate Immigration Reform Bill last year, including one that mandates that jobs be offered to American workers at a “prevailing wage” before they are offered to guest workers. Another of these amendments makes it a requirement that employers are able to prove that their workers are all legally permitted to work in the United States. His third amendment grants the FBI \$3 million a year to improve efficiency for background checks on immigrants applying for citizenship.

Obama opposed an amendment to the U.S. Senate immigration reform bill of June 2007 that would prevent immigrants with a criminal record from gaining legal status. Obama supports granting driver's licenses to illegal immigrants, and has called it a “public safety concern.”

Recently, President-elect Obama answered the following concerning his position on U.S. immigration policy:

Q1: Could you please articulate what you think are the most pressing issues for the U.S. immigrant community, at home and abroad, and how you would hope to address those issues as President.

A1: At home, the immigrant community faces a real challenge from the tension our inability to fix our immigration system has engendered. Abroad, not enough is being done to encourage job creation and economic development and to decrease the pressure to immigrate without authorization to the U.S. in search of work.

Q2: Do you support comprehensive immigration reform?

A2: Yes.

Q3: What policy conditions would comprehensive immigration reform have to meet in order for you to support it? Please be specific?

A3: I fought in the U.S. Senate for comprehensive immigration reform. And, I will make it a top priority in my first year as president. Not just because we need to secure our borders and get control of who comes into our country. And, not just because we have to crack down on

employers abusing undocumented immigrants. But because we have to finally bring the twelve million undocumented out of the shadows. We should require them to pay a fine, learn English, abide by the law, and go to the back of the line for citizenship – behind those who came here legally. But we cannot – and should not – deport 12 million people. That would turn America into something we're not; something we don't want to be.

Q4: Do you support the establishment of an expanded guest worker program?

A4: I would support a new guest worker program to meet worker shortages in some sectors of the economy, but it must have strong worker protections and not exclude people from ever becoming Americans. It must also take into account that some workers will wish to earn a right to stay in the U.S. permanently.

Q5: Do you support the switch from family based immigration standards to the merit based system put forth in the last round of proposed Senate Comprehensive Immigration Reform?

A5: I do not support the reduction of family based visas in order to create a new points-based system. I would consider supporting such a system outside existing quotas.

Q6: Do you support the “touchback” requirements of previous immigration reform legislation that would require undocumented immigrants to return to their countries of origin in order to normalize their status?

A6: I am disinclined to support touchback requirements because they are symbolic and likely to discourage participation in an earned legalization program.

Q7: Would you support an increase in the cap of low-skilled employment-based green cards issued each year from its current level of 5000?

Q7: Yes.

Q8: Would you favor raising the 65,000 cap on high-skilled H-1B temporary work visas, in light of the fact that in the last two years, H-1B visas were quickly filled in a matter of days?

A8: As part of comprehensive reform, I will consider multiple proposals for increasing access to the world's best and brightest to work in America.

Q9: Do you support the community service requirement of previous DREAM Act legislation that would grant provisional (conditional) legal residency to immigrant graduates who perform 910 hours of volunteer community service?

Q9: Yes.

Q10: What leadership have you taken on immigration issues, including but not limited to the issues addressed in this questionnaire?

A10: I participated in the immigrant marches, have attended naturalization workshops, introduced legislation to make the naturalization process more affordable and accessible, and worked with a bipartisan group of Senators to support comprehensive reform in the Senate.

Q11: On what immigration issues will you take leadership?

A11: As president, I am committed to passing comprehensive reform and fixing our immigration system to ensure that both immigration enforcement and immigration services are better executed.

We have all been waiting for a new White House administration to bring us comprehensive immigration reform to repair our broken system. President-elect Obama brings us tremendous hope. We wait with great anticipation to see what he can deliver. May we hope and pray for, and expect from him, comprehensive immigration reform to finally help us, our families and our businesses? Yes, we can.

[Portions of this article are excerpted from official AILA documents/ publications.]

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