

Draconian White House immigration reform leaked to press

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The draft of a White House immigration reform plan obtained by *USA Today* late last week is in line with proposals President Obama outlined in a public appearance last month in Las Vegas, Nevada. The plan would require the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the US wait for a period of about eight years for the chance to obtain residency, going to the “back of the line” behind legal immigrants.

The draft proposal was obtained by the newspaper from an Obama administration official who said it was being distributed to government agencies that deal with immigration and border security. The official, who asked to remain anonymous, said he was not authorized to release the proposal publicly. The White House insists that it did not authorize release of the document and would not confirm that it represented the current version of the draft.

The White House quickly contacted the group of eight Republican and Democratic Senators who have been working to draft an immigration bill. Administration officials insist that the leak was not a tactic to undercut bipartisan efforts in the House and Senate to draft their own legislation.

Republicans acted angrily to the leaked details of Obama’s proposal. Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, one of those working on legislation in the Senate, called the draft bill “half-baked and seriously flawed.” Republicans sought to position themselves to the right of the right-wing measures contained in the administration’s draft.

Rubio has accused the White House of “failing to secure our borders” and claims that Obama’s plan “creates a special pathway that puts those who broke our immigration laws at an advantage over those who chose to do things the right way and come here legally.”

The White House proposal in fact calls for beefing up security on the US-Mexico border and putting in place a series of measures that undermine not only the rights of undocumented immigrant workers, but the democratic rights of the population as a whole.

The draft plan calls for an unspecified number of new Border Patrol agents, and allows the Department of Homeland Security to expand technological improvements—including drone surveillance—to stop illegal border crossings. Republicans have called for linking any immigration “reforms” to a border security. The verdict on whether the border is “secure” would be made by a commission comprised of governors, attorneys general and “community leaders” in the states bordering Mexico.

According to the leaked draft, the White House plan would establish a process to allow “qualified” undocumented immigrants to become permanent residents within eight years by applying for a newly created “Lawful Prospective Immigrant” visa. Legal residents could then apply for citizenship after five years.

Undocumented immigrants applying for residency would have to wait behind others already in the system, including about 6 million people who presently have been approved for residency but are waiting for their green cards to be issued. Presently, many Mexican immigrants must wait at least 16 years to receive their green cards once they are approved.

To qualify for the new visa, applicants would need to pass a criminal background check, submit biometric information and pay fees and back taxes, which could amount to hundreds or thousands of dollars. They would have to learn English and “the history and government of the United States.” Those who come forward and fail to pass these benchmarks risk

deportation.

The White House draft plan would expand the government's E-Verify program, in which employers check the immigration status of prospective workers through a vast database. Businesses with more than 1,000 employees would be required to begin using the system within two years; all businesses must use it within four years.

A new "fraud-resistant, tamper-resistant and wear-resistant" Social Security card would also be developed, and the Social Security Administration would be required to issue the new cards within two years. Presumably, anyone in the US applying for a Social Security number would receive this "fraud-resistant" card, marking a step toward a universal identity card for citizens and non-citizens alike.

According to the draft, undocumented immigrants applying for the "Lawful Prospective Immigrant" visa would be disqualified if they had been convicted of a crime that led to a prison term of at least one year, or of three or more different crimes that resulted in a total of 90 days in jail. They would also face disqualification if they had committed any offense abroad that "if committed in the United States would render the alien inadmissible or removable from the United States."

Obama has claimed that his reform plan would not bar residency status for immigrants convicted of "minor" offenses. However government emails and other documents, also newly obtained by *USA Today*, show that during the administration's first term in office, immigration officials have purposefully targeted and deported immigrants on the basis of traffic violations and other minor offenses.

For example, during the fiscal year that ended last September, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents were dispatched to traffic safety checkpoints conducted by police departments and also processed increased numbers of undocumented immigrants who had been jailed for low-level offenses. ICE officials in Washington approved some of these measures, *USA Today* reports.

An ICE document obtained by the newspaper dated April 18, 2012 on "Prospective Criminal Apprehension Initiatives" of ERO (Enforcement and Removal) operations at the Atlanta, Georgia field office, describes one of these ICE "initiatives":

"We have been approached by multiple police

departments and county Sheriff's Offices to participate with them during scheduled traffic checkpoints. ICE would not be at the checkpoint itself so this would not appear to be an ICE organized checkpoint. The locals would be the lead agency checking for DWIs [Driving While Intoxicated], NOL [No Operator's License], and other traffic/criminal offenses."

The memo continues: "When the vehicles get sent to the secondary location, we (ICE) would be set up there, waiting to interview all individuals that we deem necessary. This would include occupants in the vehicle if necessary. We would also have the mobile IDENT machines set up to take fingerprints to get an accurate account of all immigration and criminal history."

ICE officials were intent on making their quota of deportations last year. Noting that deportations were down compared with the previous year, ICE's David Venturella, who oversaw the agency's field offices, wrote in an email: "The only performance measures that will count this fiscal year is the criminal alien removal target."

By fiscal year's end, ICE had deported 225,390 "criminal" immigrants—a record number, and well above the agency's target of 210,000. The Obama administration deported a total of 1.2 million immigrants over the course of his first term.



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