

President Obama Provides Moral Imperative for Immigration Reform

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Washington D.C. - Today, in Las Vegas, President Obama urged the country to join him in moving forward on immigration reform, offering a proposal that addresses the pressing economic, cultural, and moral crisis facing the nation over immigration. In doing so, he brought policies and principles down to one very important idea—that our American identity is directly tied to our heritage as immigrants and thus we owe it to each other to fix the immigration system once and for all. In laying out a moral and economic imperative for immigration reform, the President argued for a rational and productive debate, free of rancor and fear, reminding Americans that the nation was built by immigrants and “most of us used to be them.” His remarks today follow yesterday’s announcement from the United States Senate that a “gang of eight” bipartisan members have developed a set of principles to move immigration reform forward in the 113th Congress.

The President’s outline of an immigration system that reflects a 21st century America builds on policies and blueprints he championed during his first term in office. He stressed that immigration reform requires smart enforcement, a pathway to citizenship and improving legal channels. While similar to the Senate proposal released yesterday, Obama offered more detail on improving the legal immigration system to make it broader and more inclusive. There were some important differences, notably the inclusion of court reform, judicial review, entrepreneurship and a more expansive definition of families that includes same-sex couples. These differences, however, should be a tool for expanding the bipartisan negotiations not ending them. The President said he will look to the Senate to take the lead, but will not hesitate to turn his ideas into legislation if insufficient progress is made in Congress. He noted “we can’t allow immigration reform to get bogged down in an endless debate,” because a bipartisan agreement is “within our grasp.”

As an organization committed to promoting an honest, sensible discussion about immigration, we are particularly heartened by the President’s call for a rational debate, one in which highly personal and emotional issues of identity and culture do not become so polarizing that we forget that ultimately immigration reform is not about policy, but about people. Behind every idea, good or bad, there are consequences for individuals, and this must be what we ask ourselves going forward—how can immigration reform help us to maximize the promise of the American dream for all?

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