

Obama raises false hope on immigration

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If there was ever any doubt that the only thing President Obama is truly gifted at is getting people to hope for change, we need look no further than his recent announcement to review the cases of up to 300,000 illegal immigrants facing deportation.

Too bad it's false hope.

Despite initial excitement of the immigrant advocacy organizations who are fighting for nothing less than a full 1980s-style amnesty -- and the correlated anger from conservatives who believe that last week's decision to re-evaluate the existing enforcement priorities is just that -- this is not a big step in immigration policy.

This latest Obama re-election campaign stunt won't affect 97 percent of the estimated 11 million illegal immigrants in our country. It is causing a lot of confusion within the very communities it is supposed to assuage, and it is further alienating those who must come to the negotiating table to hammer out a compromise for our immigration quagmire.

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer chimed in quickly after the news broke, denouncing this plan as a "backdoor amnesty." She and others can be forgiven for initially thinking that. At first blush it sounded as though, at the very least, 300,000 lucky souls who were close to being deported had gotten a reprieve.

Many immigration experts and advocacy organizations are urging caution. They're scrambling to tell the immigrant community to not turn themselves in to authorities or try to get themselves detained for the purposes of becoming "legal." The possibility -- and it is just a possibility -- of getting a slate cleaned is open only to the 300,000 already in the pipeline for deportation. Each case will be reviewed by a panel and, if the case is closed, legal resident status will not be granted.

Then there's the relative fragility of the entire situation. Obama did nothing more than ask immigration agencies to stick to the long-stated mission of their Immigration and Customs Enforcement programs: Deport the illegal immigrants who pose the greatest threat to national and border security or to others in their community.

Michael Wildes, a Manhattan-based immigration lawyer, self-professed Democrat, and former federal prosecutor for the Eastern District of New York, told me that he's spoken with immigration agency directors who see this as a mixed message from the White House to local law enforcement organizations.

"This is merely a recommendation. It has no effect of law and is not going to change the circumstances of similarly situated people who have not been caught," Wildes said. "This memo is no more than a gratuitous smile by the Obama administration on the eve of an election." Indeed, even advocacy organization representatives who are bursting with hope are concerned that given the Department of Homeland Security's well-publicized disregard of the original guidelines, which also called for only violent or dangerous criminals to be immediately deported, effective execution of the program moving forward will be difficult.

"One of the obstacles here is the disconnect between what DHS and its agencies and field offices are doing," said Melissa Crow, director of the Legal Action Center of the American Immigration Council. "We're very encouraged by the fact that agency-wide guidance has been issued and hope that training, quality control, and monitoring will come with it. But it is going to be a big challenge. Certainly not everyone at Immigration and Customs Enforcement will be politically on board with the

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tone of these new announcements."

They're not the only ones.

Many are infuriated that an unknown number of the 300,000 immigrants who have already been identified for removal might get the opportunity not only to stay in country in a de facto legal status, but to apply for and possibly receive a work permit -- during a time of high unemployment.

This is exactly what it looks like: vote pandering from a candidate who has shown no leadership on an issue he claims is important for the health of the entire country.

Obama has chosen to appear benevolent to Latinos and immigrants while coming off as imperious to those in Congress who want to prevent even more illegal immigration, even though he needs these legislators' cooperation to get anything done.

That's our president: You can hope all you want, but he's not going to change.

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