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# Immigrant-rights groups debate reform vs. deportation relief

Some immigration reformers want time to pass a comprehensive bill. Others want action on deportations now. Meanwhile, an O.C. anti-illegal immigration group tells GOP "not to cave."

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BY ROXANA KOPETMAN / STAFF WRITER  
Published: May 31, 2014 Updated: June 1, 2014 8:07 a.m.



CINDY YAMANAKA, <137>PHOTOS: CINDY YAMANAKA, <137>STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Gurmukh Singh, a taxi driver who lives with his wife and teenage daughters in Garden Grove, doesn't know quite what to make of the latest twists involving the nation's immigration and deportation laws.

President Barack Obama unexpectedly announced this week that he would delay a promised review of, and a potential more "humane" approach to, deportations to give Republicans more time to approve a comprehensive immigration bill.

Some immigration advocacy groups are supporting the move. Many others are not.

For people like Singh, who faces deportation after living in the United States for 16 years, the president's decision is certainly not going to help him - at least not in the immediate future.

"It's very hard. I don't want to be separated from my family," said Singh, an

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undocumented immigrant from India with no criminal record who is seeking asylum. He said he was kidnapped and tortured because of his Sikh faith. His wife and children are U.S. citizens.

Alexis Nava Teodoro, a leader in a local immigrant youth group working to stop deportations in Orange County, said Singh and others will suffer from inaction on deportations.

“They need to stop playing political games with our lives,” Nava Teodoro, of RAIZ, said of the Obama administration and the pro-immigrant groups that asked the president to delay a decision on revamping deportation policies.

Last Tuesday, a number of national groups released a statement urging Obama to allow time for House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and his colleagues to “seize this moment” and pass an immigration reform bill by August. They asked Obama to hold off on issuing any administrative action to give the House leadership “all of the space they may need to bring legislation to the floor for a vote.” If Congress then fails to act, they said Obama will have an obligation to act against “the tragic family breakups and economic disruption that has become the daily norm.”

The groups included the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, the Service Employees International Union and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration.

Other pro-immigrant organizations were not consulted. And they don’t agree with the decision.

The National Day Laborer Organizing Network said Friday that “a delay serves no one and nothing but the status quo.” At the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, executive director Angelica Salas said: “President Obama is wrong in halting a much-needed review of immigration deportations many agree is fraught with injustice.”

Muzaffar Chishti, of the Migration Policy Institute, said it was a judgment call on the part of Obama, and either way, he was bound to anger some of the advocacy groups. But by postponing executive action on deportations, he avoided giving the Republicans an excuse to not move forward on immigration reform “even if that possibility is remote,” Chishti said.

“There is good reason to believe that what the president did is the politically right thing to do,” said Chishti, director of MPI’s office at New York University School of Law.

Reshma Shamasunder, executive director of the L.A.-based California Immigrant Policy Center, said tens of thousands could be deported through this summer.

“Whatever political football is being tossed around, it’s being tossed around at the expense of immigrant communities and the pain and suffering they are experiencing, and it’s unacceptable,” Shamasunder said.

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