LATINOS POST

Immigration Reform 2013: Obama Speaks On Leaked Bill; Senators Debate Federal ID Card For All Workers

By: Jean-Paul Salamanca - February 21, 2013

Despite the leak of part of his immigration proposal in the press earlier this week, President Obama remains confident that the news of the bill drafted by the White House won't hurt the ongoing negotiations in Congress geared towards reforming the immigration system.

As Reuters reports, President Obama downplayed the significance of the leak on the ongoing negotiations on immigration reform to San Antonio's KWEX television station, an affiliate of the Spanish-language network Univision, in an interview at the White House.

"It certainly didn't jeopardize the entire process. The negotiations are still moving forward," President Obama said, dismissing such news leaks as a common occurrence in Washington.

However, as he stated in his Las Vegas speech weeks before, Obama warned that if Congress did not come to an agreement on legislation to address immigration issues, he would submit his own version of a bill to Congress for a vote.

Republicans gave a strong, negative reaction to the news of the leaked bill from the White House, which was reported by USA Today Sunday, which key GOP members such as U.S. Sens. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., and Paul Ryan, R-Wis., criticized as flawed while blasting Obama for drafting legislation on immigration without seeking input from members of Congress.

White House officials denied that the leak was intentional.

Meanwhile, on Capitol Hill, several key legislators are looking into the possibility of an immigration bill that would force every U.S. worker to carry a high-tech ID card that could use fingerprints or other markings to determine a person legal status.

The Wall Street Journal reported that several members of the "Gang of Eight" look as if they are in favor of creating biometric ID cards, which is "signaled only in vaguely worded language" by the senators writing the bipartisan immigration bill.

While businesses can check on a worker's immigration status via E-Verify, immigrants can slip through the system if they provide stolen names, dates of birth and Social Security numbers. In a statement, the senate group called for workers to prove their eligibility to work through "non-forgeable electronic means."

However, none of the bipartisan senate panel have committed to the idea at this fragile time in the immigration debates for fear of splintering the support of Democrats, Republicans and outside groups who are pushing to get a deal done on immigration this year.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham ,R-S.C., said, according to the Journal, that the language in the statement referred to biometric cards. "This is the public's way of contributing to solving the problem" of illegal immigration, Mr. Graham said.

Sen. Jeff Flake, R., Ariz., said that he is open to the idea of biometric ID cards, yet nothing was set in stone on that front just yet. "You've got to give employers the tools" to screen new workers, Mr. Flake said, noting he had signed on to legislation in past years that employed biometric data.

However, critics say that instituting such a measure could have other implications, such as the possibility of eventually having the card become a requirement to do things such as vote, purchase firearms or even board airplanes.

"It's not only a gross violation of individual privacy, it's an enormously high-cost policy that will have an incredibly low to negligible benefit," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration-policy expert at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.