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Advocates on both sides take dim view of Obama's immigration stance

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By Laurie Liles

WASHINGTON – As Congress returned from its August recess this week, Arizonans from both parties had harsh reactions to President Barack Obama's recent about-face on executive action on immigration reform.

The president had [vowed June 30](#) to take action on his own by the end of the summer if Congress had failed to enact comprehensive reform by then. Congress has not acted, but Obama [said this weekend](#) that he would delay executive action until the end of the year.

That led Republicans to accuse Obama of playing politics and immigration reformers to say the president had once again broken his word to immigrants.

Sen. Jeff Flake, R-Ariz., one of eight senators who pushed a bipartisan [immigration reform](#) measure through the Senate last year, called the president's decision "transparently political."

"Such action will make genuine reform of our immigration system even more difficult," Flake said in a statement his office released Saturday.

Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Prescott, also cried foul, saying in an email that by delaying action until after the November elections the president has made a sensitive political issue even more political.

"Waiting ... in order to protect vulnerable Democrats within his own party is not leadership and the American people cannot afford to play President Obama's political games any longer," Gosar's statement said.

But Republicans were not the only ones voicing disapproval.

Advocacy groups pushing for comprehensive immigration reform say they have all but given up hope that Congress will act any time soon. They were relying on the president to take action and keep up the pressure on lawmakers, and Obama's delay amounts to yet another betrayal of the immigrant community, they said.

"This is not the first time this president has broken a promise he's made on immigration," said Frank Sharry, executive director of the pro-reform America's Voice.

Sharry noted that Obama vowed to make immigration reform a priority in his first term, but ramped up deportations instead. And he questions whether the president will take action even after the elections.

“The jury’s still out on whether he’s really going to act at all,” he said. “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.”

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, backs business visa reforms and other immigration changes that it says would boost the nation’s economy.

“It’s an unfortunate delay that puts the brakes on overall reforms to the immigration system,” said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at Cato. “It’s also entirely predictable.”

Martha McSally, the Republican nominee challenging Rep. Ron Barber, D-Tucson, for Arizona’s 2nd District seat in Congress, said she supports business-oriented immigration reforms and criticized the president’s delay.

“Securing our border and reforming our legal immigration system so it’s focused on economic growth must be the first priority,” McSally said in an email. “What the president should be doing is using the authority he already has ... but he is instead playing politics on an important issue.”

Barber did not respond to requests for comment on the president’s announcement.

But Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Tucson, whose district shares Arizona’s portion of the U.S-Mexico border with Barber’s, did not pull any punches over the president’s decision.

“President Obama placed political calculations over the hopes and needs of immigrant communities,” Grijalva said in a statement.

“He reneged on his own commitment ... to do what is right, and instead chose what is expedient, betraying the trust of some of the most vulnerable among us,” he said.