

# THE DAILY CALLER

## President Obama's Delayed Action On Immigration Is Part Of A Long Pattern

By [Alex Nowrasteh](#)

September 10, 2014

President Obama's much anticipated executive actions to reform immigration have been delayed, again. The president [explained](#) this by saying, "The truth of the matter is that the politics did shift midsummer because of that problem [unaccompanied children]." He further said he wants to "make sure that the public understands why we're doing this, why it's the right thing for the American people, why it's the right thing for the American economy." Regardless of his reasons, the president's decision to delay executive action has angered many of his pro-immigration supporters.

However, those who support immigration reform should not be surprised by the president's delay. President Obama has a long history of tightening immigration enforcement and only tepidly supporting reform.

Even when he was a senator, Obama voted for a poison-pill amendment that killed immigration reform in 2007. His vote for the Dorgan amendment, named after then-Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D, gutted a portion of the bill and Republican support for the proposal along with it. The poison pill amendment passed 49 to 48 thanks to then-Senator Obama's unexpected support.

Obama's actions as president are worse. Early in his administration he appointed noted immigration enforcer Janet Napolitano, the governor of Arizona who signed the strictest state level enforcement law up to that time, as head of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Under her watch, deportations skyrocketed as thousands of local communities were forced into a federal program called Secure Communities – a Bush era program to round up and deport unauthorized immigrants.

President Obama's record deportations continued for years until early 2012. In that year, DHS shifted emphasis from deportations to border enforcement. Deportations remained high, but now more unlawful immigrants were removed with harsh consequences – spending long periods of time in detention facilities, going through immigration court, and being flown into the interior of Mexico.

This so-called “enforcement with consequences” policy packed immigration courts to the brim. Currently, almost 400,000 cases are waiting to be heard due to the prosecution of so many unlawful immigrants.

His administration also pursued regulatory rule changes that increased the barriers to legal migration. Rules for work visas in the tech sector, agricultural sector, and seasonal work were all toughened under his administration despite being loosened during the Bush administration.

To President Obama’s credit, in 2012 he pursued the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program that temporarily halted the deportations of more than [600,000](#) unlawful immigrants who were brought here as children, allowing them to work for two years. President Obama also supported the 2013 bi-partisan immigration reform effort – albeit from the sidelines.

When a White House official recently [blamed](#) “Republicans’ extreme politicization of this issue” for obstructing immigration reform, it should be remembered that President Obama could have emphasized immigration reform in 2009 and 2010 when Democrats controlled both houses of Congress. Instead his attention was focused on passing a disastrous healthcare law and a failed stimulus bill instead of bipartisan immigration reform.

Immigration reform is almost as difficult a subject for Democrats to tackle as it is for Republicans. One core Democratic constituency is labor unions who have historically opposed immigration liberalizations and supported restrictive laws for over a century. Publicly, many unions support reform but outside of the public’s eye they undermine reform efforts. Many other Democrats support immigration reform regardless of union obstruction. President Obama no doubt feels these pressures.

The president’s delay of minor executive actions and his harsh immigration enforcement policies are having an unexpected result. According to a recent [survey](#) by the Pew Research Center, 11 percent of Hispanic-Americans describe themselves as libertarian. Anti-immigration rhetoric from some Republicans and contradictory messages and policies from Democrats are driving some of this younger demographic affected by our restrictive immigration laws in a new ideological and political direction.

The president’s ability to unilaterally streamline the legal immigration system and defer deportations is extremely limited by the Constitution – as it should be. His reluctance to take even those [minor actions that are allowed under the law](#) is disappointing to those who support immigration reform, but it should not be surprising.

*Alex Nowrasteh is an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute.*