



Trump will allow immigrants to obtain citizenship through military service

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A Defense Department official says that the U.S. military will continue to welcome noncitizen recruits and that the Trump administration also will continue a long-standing policy that allows members of the military and their families a pathway to citizenship for their service.

“Today's service members are eligible for expedited citizenship under a July 2002 executive order and the military services have worked closely with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to streamline citizenship processing for service members,” Lt. Col. Myles Caggins said last week in an email to Fox News. “Law ensures that the sacrifice of noncitizens during a time of national need is met with an opportunity for early citizenship, to recognize their contribution and sacrifice.”

Caggins said there are no plans to discontinue or modify the initiative.

President Trump has been a staunch advocate for bolstering the military and has repeatedly expressed his intentions to stop the flow of illegal immigrants into the U.S. But he has not publicly offered a definitive opinion on the immigration policy concerning noncitizens in the military.

The closest Trump has come to addressing the issue was on Sept. 7, 2016, during a presidential candidates' forum. He was asked by a woman who served in the military whether he thinks that a person living in the United States illegally who wants to serve in the U.S. armed forces should be allowed to stay in the country legally.

“I think when you serve in the armed forces, that’s a very special situation and I could see myself working that out, absolutely,” Trump replied.

Then, after speaking about the necessity to properly vet people, Trump said, “But the answer is it would be a very special circumstance, yes.”

According to DoD data, 5,000 legal permanent residents are recruited each year under the Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest Program launched in 2009. The average number of noncitizens on active duty from 2010 to 2016 was about 18,700.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service established the Naturalization at Basic Training Initiative in August 2009 with the Army to give noncitizen enlistees the opportunity to naturalize when they graduate from basic training. By 2013, the Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps had followed suit.

In fiscal year 2016 alone, 359 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals recipients, also referred to as “Dreamers,” enlisted in the Army, which is the only branch that accepts this immigrant category.

“Concerning naturalization, the decision to become a U.S. citizen is a voluntary individual decision and each service provides assistance to service members seeking citizenship,” Caggins said. “Per U.S. Customs and Immigration Service, more than 109,000 servicemen and women have naturalized through 2015.”

The list of immigrants who have made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of their new country is long and distinguished.

On March 21, 2003, Guatemalan native and U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Jose Gutierrez was among the first servicemen to die in Iraq. He was posthumously granted full citizenship. A week later, Mexican immigrant and fellow Marine Jesus Alberto Suarez del Solar was killed in action during a tour in Iraq.

Alex Nowrasteh, immigration policy analyst for the Cato Institute, said recruits must have some kind of recognized immigration status to join the military, whether they are a DACA recipient, green card holder or on a work or student visa. He said the military won’t take someone who has no documentation.

With that being said, Nowrasteh said the military is a viable option toward citizenship if the individual accepts the risks and obligation.

“It is absolutely a good thing for immigrants to serve in the U.S. military,” he said. “There is a long history of non-citizens serving with distinction in the military.”