



Libertarian view of Obama plan on immigration

By John A. Tures
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It's becoming clear to political observers that libertarians are emerging as a key swing vote, if not an official party. Republicans may have won a number of close races by appealing to these libertarians, so their views on policy cannot be ignored.

Figuring out those libertarian views on immigration is therefore very important in the wake of President Barack Obama's prime-time speech announcing his executive order on immigration.

So I contacted Alex Nowrasteh for that policy perspective. He's the immigration policy analyst for the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity. We met at the Association for Private Enterprise Education annual meeting in Las Vegas in the spring of 2014.

What is your reaction to the executive order? Is it a good plan?

Viewed narrowly from the policy perspective only, the President's executive order improves policy, will lead to wage and economic growth, and decreases the humanitarian harm done by our restrictive immigration policy.

How do you feel about it being an executive order? Do you prefer that Congress acted on immigration?

A bill passed by Congress would have been vastly superior. A bill could have offered a permanent solution, expanded legal immigration opportunities, and avoided the dubious constitutionality of a far-reaching executive order.

What do you think are the chances Congress will act on immigration?

There is a very good chance that Congress will use this opportunity to counter Obama's actions by passing their own package of immigration reform bills. This executive order could have poisoned the well for future immigration reform bills, but I'm not convinced there was much water in that well to begin with.

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Democrats seemed more supportive of the idea. In a "Moveon" email to me, Helen Chavez wrote:

"Tonight, President Obama kept his promise to me and to the American people by using his power to help many of the immigrants who toil in our fields, make beds, clean rooms, cook meals, work in construction and manufacturing, and care for our young and elderly. They serve our country in the military. I've known the farm workers all my life. Like other immigrants, they take jobs most other Americans won't take, for pay most other Americans won't accept, and under conditions most other Americans won't tolerate. Big parts of our economy can't survive without immigrants.

"All President Obama did is what President Reagan and President George H.W. Bush did: allowing some immigrants to stay and work here. Most of the immigrants who qualify have been in this country for some time. They have clean records. What the President did is just temporary, and he acted only after Republicans in the House of Representatives repeatedly refused to pass a bipartisan bill that already passed the U.S. Senate. President Obama did the right thing on immigration. Please join me in thanking him for his leadership. At the same time, we should urge Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that will solve this problem once and for all."

Republicans had a different plan. They not only seem opposed to the fact that it is an executive order, but object to the policy itself. House Speaker John Boehner noted in an AFP article carried by Yahoo News: "The president has said before that 'he's not king' and he's 'not an emperor,' but he's sure acting like one." There are threats to defund such a policy, make a court challenge. Even calls for impeachment can't be far behind.

As you can see, Libertarians are more supportive of the President's idea, but not his methods. Both parties would do well to consider their views, a possible compromise that could end the gridlock on immigration.