



Pro-immigration reform right oppose Obama acting unilaterally

By [Jason Russell](#)

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When President Obama was pushing comprehensive immigration reform last year, the concept had the support of some policy thinkers on the right. But that won't be the case should he follow through on his plans for executive action.

As early as this week, Obama is expected to announce an executive order that will defer the deportations of certain people in the country illegally if, for instance, their children were born in the United States and the family has resided here for a certain number of years. According to Pew Research Center, between [1 million and 4.5 million](#) currently illegal residents could be affected by such an order depending on the required duration of residence in the United States.

Even those on the right who are sympathetic to a more open immigration policy say an executive order would kill any hope of comprehensive immigration reform in the next two years.

“The only one who has a political agenda that’s served by this is the President,” Douglas Holtz-Eakin, the president of American Action Forum, told the *Washington Examiner*. In April 2013, Holtz-Eakin [published a paper](#) supporting comprehensive immigration reform on the grounds that it would boost economic growth and reduce the federal deficit by \$2.7 trillion over 10 years. But Obama’s expected executive order is misguided and would be ineffective, he said.

“It’s not beneficial to keep changing the rules...these aren’t solutions to any of the genuine problems,” Holtz-Eakin said. He argued that Obama’s proposal, as it's being described in media accounts, wouldn't address the lack of green cards or clarify how people who are here illegally might gain legal status.

Holtz-Eakin’s paper called for reforms that would attract more immigrants into the country to boost the American economy, but an executive order would do nothing to further that goal.

Alex Nowrasteh of the libertarian Cato Institute, who was more sympathetic to the policy of deferred deportations, expressed concerns about using an executive order to enact it. “Having at least temporary legal work authorization will be a big boost for a lot of these currently unlawful workers,” he said. He said employers should mostly be in favor of the policy because they would be more ensured of a worker’s legal status.

Still, Nowrasteh said he had doubts about the constitutionality of the expected executive order and questioned the impact it would have on further immigration reform.

As the potential scope of the president's executive order widens, the odds of the Republican Congress doing anything on immigration in the next two years diminishes.

Nowrasteh did not suggest this was likely, but said the Republican Congress could respond by daring Obama to veto an alternative immigration reform that combined the DREAM Act and increased enforcement while ignoring union demands by enacting a guest worker visa program. Such a bill would split two of Obama's most-fervent supporters: Hispanic immigration activists and labor unions.

Regardless of the policy implications involved, conservatives and libertarians are clearly tired of Obama's growing tendency to bypass Congress and rule by decree. His executive order may temporarily grant a legal reprieve to a few million immigrants, but in the long-term, unilateral action would only provide the appearance of reform while killing any prospect of meaningful reform in the near future.