

Homeland Security Secretary: Illegals Have 'Earned Right to be Citizens'

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(CNSNews.com) – Speaking at the United States Conference of Mayors on Friday, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson said the approximately 11 million people who are in the country illegally have “earned the right to be citizens.”

“An earned path to citizenship for those currently present in this country is a matter of, in my view, homeland security to encourage people to come out from the shadows,” said Johnson, in what he remarked was one of his first public speeches since being confirmed as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) chief in December.

“It is also, frankly, in my judgment, a matter of who we are as Americans,” he said, “to offer the opportunity to those who want to be citizens, who’ve earned the right to be citizens, who are present in this country--many of whom came here as children--to have the opportunity that we all have to try to become American citizens.”



Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson spoke on Jan. 24, 2014 at the U.S. Conference of Mayors in Washington, D.C. (CNSNews.com/Penny Starr)

Johnson, who had earlier served as general counsel for the Department of Defense under Obama from 2009 to 2012, told the more than 270 mayors in attendance that enforcing immigration law was one of the main missions of DHS.

“The five core missions of the Department of Homeland Security are guarding against terrorism, securing our borders, enforcing our nation’s immigration laws, safeguarding cyberspace and critical infrastructure in partnership with the private sector, and supporting emergency preparedness and response efforts at every level,” Johnson said.

Then he concluded his remarks by calling for “comprehensive, common sense, immigration reform.”

“Common sense immigration reform is supported by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, businesses, and if the polls (are) to be believed, the majority of the American people,” Johnson said. “Border security is inseparable from homeland security.”

“And border security must and should be part of comprehensive immigration reform – protecting our borders, securing our ports, promoting the lawful flow of trade and travel through our ports to cities and other communities,” he said.

Johnson touted the alleged improvement in border security over the last four years and said comprehensive immigration reform also would increase that security.

“Comprehensive immigration reform would also promote a more effective and efficient system for enforcing our immigration laws, and should include an earned path to citizenship for the approximately 11-and-a-half-million undocumented immigrants present in this country, something like 86% of whom have been here almost 10 years,” Johnson said.

“An earned path to citizenship for those currently present in this country is a matter of, in my view, homeland security to encourage people to

come out from the shadows, to be accountable, to participate in the American experience, the American society," he said.

"It is also, frankly, in my judgment, a matter of who we are as Americans," said Johnson. "To offer the opportunity to those who want to be citizens, who've earned the right to be citizens, who are present in this country – many of whom who came here as children – to have the opportunity that we all have to try to become American citizens."

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