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Obama Threatens Amnesty Executive Action Before New Congress Sworn In

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By: REUTERS

U.S. President Barack Obama defended his plan to use executive powers to implement some immigration reforms, saying in an interview broadcast on Sunday he had waited long enough for Congress to act.

Obama told congressional leaders on Friday he would try to ease some restrictions on undocumented immigrants, despite warnings from Republican leaders that such actions would "poison the well" or would be "a red flag in front of a bull".

The meeting came after Obama's Democratic Party was punished in midterm elections on Tuesday. Republicans seized the U.S. Senate and kept a majority in the House of Representatives, in what Obama said was a message from voters who held him responsible for how Washington worked, or didn't.

In an interview on CBS' "Face the Nation," Obama said he had watched while the U.S. Senate produced a bipartisan immigration reform bill, only to have it not taken up by House Republican Speaker John Boehner.

Obama said he had told Boehner if he could not get it done by year's end, the White House was going to have to take steps to improve the system.

"Everybody agrees the immigration system's broken. And we've been talking about it for years now in terms of fixing it," Obama said in the interview, according to a CBS transcript.

U.S. borders needed to be secure, the legal immigration system needed to be more efficient and there needed to be a path to legal status for the 11 million undocumented immigrants.

"We don't have the capacity to deport 11 million people -- everybody agrees on that," he said.

Obama insisted he was not telling Republicans they had run out of time or trying to circumvent them.

"The minute they pass a bill that addresses the problems with immigration reform, I will sign it and it supersedes whatever actions I take," Obama said in the interview.

"And I'm encouraging them to do so ... on parallel track we're going to be implementing an executive action.

"But if in fact a bill gets passed, nobody's going to be happier than me to sign it, because that means it will be permanent rather than temporary."

Without any changes, the government will continue to misallocate resources, deport people who should not be deported and not deport those who are dangerous, he said.

Any unilateral action promises to draw the ire of Republicans in Congress. U.S. Senator John Barrasso, the No. 4 Republican in the Senate, told Reuters on Friday members of Congress had told Obama that would be a "toxic decision".

"It will hurt cooperation on every issue," Barrasso told "Fox News Sunday".

"What the president does over the next two months is going to set the tone for the next two years."

Representative Darrell Issa, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, said on ABC's "This Week" he hoped Obama would delay action "and have a real comprehensive discussion about what's possible, because a great deal is possible on immigration reform."

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