

A HOME AT LAST! THOUSANDS OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ON THE THRESHOLD OF NEW-FOUND IDENTITY AND LEGITIMACY



Obama administration officials said on Friday that, come the 15th of August, thousands of young illegal immigrants could seek two-year deferrals of deportation, bringing to a close months of uncertainty and ambiguity, following the President's historic and brave decision. While explaining how the process would work, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Director Alejandro Mayorkas said that the total cost for the application process will be \$465 and that illegal immigrants who came into the country as children, younger than 16, who have graduated high school or served in the military can apply for deferment. Moreover, they can also apply for work permits. The applicants apart from filling the forms, provide valid identification, would be photographed and would have to give their finger prints. The announcement of the much awaited date has seen prospective applicants scurrying for their birth-certificates, high school diplomas and military records to prove that they qualify for the amnesty program. An estimated 800,000 illegal immigrants are likely to apply for deferrals and work permits. With apprehensions and misgivings regarding the plan, announced by Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano in June, been assuaged, the illegal immigrants are fearful of being misled or fleeced by real or fake immigration attorneys. Gerardo Salinas, 25, himself an illegal immigrant entered the country, courtesy his parents, who brought him to Chicago 12 years ago. He said following, Security Secretary Janet Napolitano's life changing announcement, he approached two attorneys who had marketed their services over the radio. Both said that it would cost him \$1700 for them to assess his paperwork and submit it to the relevant authorities. He declined to pay the fees. The visibly-challenged Salinas, who lost his eyesight when he was 12, and wants to become an immigration attorney said that he was shocked and saddened to see people exploiting a life-altering situation for the Latino youth. "They're Latinos," he said of the attorneys. "They may not be undocumented, but they have relatives, friends who are or were undocumented. They should know how much we suffer to work, how much we suffer getting health care, with school. It's sad." Similar stories of exploitation and deceitful practices have been flooding the offices of civil rights groups and members of the Congress for weeks. So much so that it has prompted around a dozen Congressmen to counsel the people against attorneys, who are also referred to as "notarius." Rep. Xavier Becerra, D-Calif. said, "Please don't be taken advantage of. You don't need an attorney." Even those illegal immigrants can apply who have already been earmarked for deportation and are in the middle of extradition proceedings, officials said. Jacqueline Esposito, of the New York Immigration Coalition said that the fears of many, that the government will use the program to identify and capture relatives who are illegal immigrants is baseless and unfounded. He said that information provided in the applications would be kept confidential and would not be disclosed, nor would it be used to apprehend people. "There's a lot of skepticism about DHS and this administration," Esposito said. "We are assuring them that they're not putting their families at risk if they apply." "We're going to issue a very clear statement that information used in the (deferred action) request will not be used for enforcement purposes," a senior administration official said. "I think that was one of the biggest concerns," said Benita Veliz, 27, a St. Mary's University graduate whose deportation case was closed last year but who has not been eligible for a work permit. "For them to be able to assure applicants for the information not being able to be used against them is very important for people to be able to take advantage of the policy." However, applicants were cautioned not to attempt to defraud the system. Not only would it have serious legal consequences for them, it would also belittle and dilute the entire movement and hinder the path for their entitled brethren. "Tell the truth on the applications," said Rep. Howard Berman, D-Calif., one of the original sponsors of the DREAM Act. "There is nothing that will hurt our long-term cause or your individual situation more than misrepresenting critical facts on that form. It will come back to haunt you in ways you can't anticipate." Officials, however, said that even though they would not use the application process to round up illegal immigrants, applicants who falsify on the forms, those who have serious criminal histories, those who pose a threat to public safety or are security risks could be prosecuted for deportation. Other factors that could disqualify applicants include "committing a felony or a "significant" transgression like firearms or burglary or three or more misdemeanors." However, driving without a license would not give cause to disqualify as most illegal immigrants, at some time or the other have infringed on this, as they did not qualify for licenses owing to their illegality. Mayorkas did not put a figure on how much the whole process would cost or how many new staff would be needed and at what cost. However, it is estimated that it could cost up to \$585 million, with most of the cost being met by the \$465 application fees. It does seem, though, that the government will come up a little short. Officials becalmed fears that tax dollars may be used to meet the shortfall and said that there would be no waivers of the application fee. The entire process could take months to complete. Critics, especially Republicans were quick to dismiss Obama's amnesty scheme as a ploy to win the Hispanic vote and called it a stop-gap arrangement, but even they stopped short of saying that it should be revoked and rescinded. The risk of alienating an important voting bloc, especially in the Presidential year was just not worth taking. Those opposed to the program, including Rep. Lamar Smith R-Texas, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee said that the guidance issued "leaves the door wide open for fraud." Moreover, he alleged, the program will divert funding from Citizenship and Immigration Services officers working on legal visa applications. He said it was surprising how, on a day when the national unemployment rate rose to 8.3 percent; the administration could be straining themselves to help illegal immigrants. "Today's guidance undermines the rule of law and gives lawbreakers an unfair advantage over legal immigrants," Smith said. "When will this president's assault on the rule of law and the American people end?"