

The Washington Post

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Obama renews effort to reform immigration laws despite detractors

By Perry Bacon Jr., Tuesday, May , 6:48 PM

The Obama administration is beginning another effort to change the nation's immigration laws, despite little enthusiasm from Republicans in Congress.

President Obama met for more than an hour Tuesday with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, his third session on the issue at the White House in the past three weeks. White House aides promised a renewed push to try to persuade Congress and the American public to back Obama's proposals, which would combine stronger enforcement of current immigration laws with the creation of a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants.

"He is committed and will be leaning into this issue in a very serious and very vigorous way," said Melody Barnes, Obama's top domestic policy adviser.

The new effort comes as Obama starts his 2012 reelection campaign needing to rebuild support among Latinos, many of whom view immigration reform as critical. Obama won two-thirds of the Hispanic vote in 2008, but some polls have shown that his approval ratings have dipped among this key electoral bloc.

High turnout among Latinos could help Obama win in states such as Colorado and Florida, although White House officials emphasize that they have long sought to reform immigration laws and are not pushing the issue only because of the 2012 campaign.

Barnes said the White House, aware of the opposition from congressional Republicans, will seek to build a coalition outside Washington that includes business leaders, law enforcement figures and others. Over the past few weeks, Obama has met with a range of people, most of whom back his vision for immigration reform, including former New York police commissioner William Bratton and "Desperate Housewives" star Eva Longoria.

From: kelly <pdk952@aol.com>

To: T <team952@aol.com>; K <pdk952@aol.com>

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