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FEATURED Q&A

Will U.S. Lawmakers Take Up Reforms to Immigration?



In his State of the Union address last week, U.S. President Joe Biden called on Congress to pass reforms to the country's immigration laws. // Photo: U.S. House of Representatives.

Q In his State of the Union address on March 1, U.S. President Joe Biden called on Congress to pass immigration reform, including a pathway to citizenship for "Dreamers," or undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children. He also called on legislators to revise laws so that U.S. businesses have the workers they need and families don't have to "wait decades to reunite." Will Congress pass immigration reform this year, and what changes in law are most likely to win approval? To what extent might labor shortages in the United States spur lawmakers to enact immigration reform to make it easier for employers to fill jobs? What are the strongest forces standing in the way of comprehensive immigration reform in the United States?

A Nicole Hallett, associate clinical professor of law and director of the Immigrants' Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School: "I was hopeful about the prospect of immigration reform when Biden took office, but it has become increasingly clear that major legislative action is off the table for the foreseeable future. The primary reason is that Democrats and Republicans are further apart than ever when it comes to the issue of immigration. While 20 years ago there was a broad moderate consensus for some kind of amnesty program coupled with increased border security, many Republicans have abandoned their support for amnesty, while Democrats have largely decided that the border is secure enough and that any reform should focus on making the immigration system more humane. Unless one party wins the White House, the House of Representatives and a

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Former Honduran National Police Chief Arrested

Honduran authorities arrested former National Police Chief Juan Carlos "El Tigre" Bonilla, who is wanted in the United States on drug trafficking charges. Bonilla, who headed the National Police between 2012 and 2013, denies wrongdoing.

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ECONOMIC

Mexico's Inflation Rate Rises Faster Than Expected

Mexico's rate of inflation rose faster than expected in February, leading to expectations that the central bank will continue raising interest rates.

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ECONOMIC

Colombian City of Barranquilla Signs Wind Power Deal

The Colombian city of Barranquilla signed an agreement with a Danish company to build a wind farm off the country's coast, Colombian Energy Minister Diego Mesa announced.

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Mesa // File Photo: Colombian Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Ex-Honduran Nat'l Police Chief Wanted by U.S. Arrested

Honduran authorities on Wednesday arrested a former National Police chief who is wanted in the United States on drug trafficking charges, Reuters reported, citing a spokesman for the Central American country's judiciary. Juan Carlos "El Tigre" Bonilla, who was Honduras' national police chief between 2012 and 2013, was arrested while he was driving through a toll booth near Tegucigalpa, Supreme Court spokesman Melvin Duarte told the wire service. U.S. federal prosecutors in New York announced charges against Bonilla in 2020, alleging that he aided in shipments of cocaine bound for the United States. Bonilla has denied the allegations. At the time that U.S. prosecutors announced the charges nearly two years ago, then-U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman alleged that Bonilla played a pivotal role in an international drug ring, working alongside former Honduran Congressman Tony Hernández and his brother, former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, the AP reported. Tony Hernández was sentenced last year in the United States to life in prison. Juan Orlando Hernández was arrested in Honduras last month on drug trafficking charges, which he denies. He is currently awaiting a Honduran judge's decision on whether he will be extradited to the United States.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Colombian City of Barranquilla Signs Wind Power Deal

The Colombian city of Barranquilla has signed a deal with a Danish company to develop an offshore wind farm in the Caribbean Sea, the first such facility of its kind in the Andean

country, Colombian Energy Minister Diego Mesa announced on Tuesday, Reuters reported. The office of Barranquilla's mayor signed the memorandum of understanding with Denmark's Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners to build a 350 megawatt wind farm off the coast, supply chain industry publication Splash 247 reported Wednesday. "The country has a potential for power generation of 50 gigawatts with offshore projects, which almost triples the current installed capacity of the entire country, which is 17.7 gigawatts," Mesa said Tuesday at the CERAWEEK by S&P Global conference in Houston. "The country multiplied 25 times its installed capacity for the generation of renewable energy from nonconventional sources, with 20 solar farms, one wind farm, 10 large-scale self-generation projects and more than 2,500 small-scale self-generation photovoltaic solar projects," Mesa added, according to daily newspaper El Heraldo. Mesa also said the development of the renewable energy industry could attract \$27 billion in investments by 2050, Reuters reported. The wind farm off Colombia's Caribbean coast could bring in as much as \$1 billion in investments, the wire service reported.

Rate of Inflation Rises Faster Than Expected in Mexico

Mexico's rate of inflation grew faster than expected last month, with the highest levels of underlying price pressures in 20 years, according to data that INEGI, Mexico's national statistics office, released Wednesday, Reuters reported. The figures showed that consumer price inflation in February was more than twice the Bank of Mexico's target, rising to 7.28 percent from 7.07 percent in January. The rate was also higher than the 7.23 percent estimated for February in a Reuters poll. The accelerating inflation is adding to expectations that the central bank will continue raising interest rates, the wire service reported. Core inflation in the country also rose to 6.59 percent in February, Bloomberg News reported. Jessica Roldan, chief economist at Casa de Bolsa

NEWS BRIEFS

Colombia's Duque to Meet With Biden Today at White House

Colombian President Iván Duque and U.S. President Joe Biden are scheduled to meet today at the White House and are expected to discuss relations with Venezuela, Reuters reported. On Monday, Duque voiced concerns about talks last weekend between a U.S. delegation and Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government. The Colombian president's long-scheduled visit to Washington comes ahead of the Andean country's legislative elections and presidential primaries on Sunday.

Brazilians Protest Bill to Allow Mining on Indigenous Lands

Thousands of Brazilians gathered outside the country's Congress on Wednesday to protest legislation that would allow mining on Indigenous lands, which protesters say would damage the Amazon rainforest, the Associated Press reported. President Jair Bolsonaro had sought quick approval of the measure, but lower house Speaker Arthur Lira said a working group would study the bill and report back in a month, Reuters reported.

U.S. Bars Former Ecuadoran President Bucaram From Entry

The U.S. State Department announced Wednesday that the United States is barring former Ecuadorean President Abdalá Bucaram from entering the country, alleging that he is involved in "significant corruption." The State Department alleged in a statement that Bucaram, who was Ecuador's president from 1996 to 1997, "engaged in multiple corrupt acts, including accepting bribes and stealing public funds." The State Department also said it was barring Bucaram's wife and three sons from entry into the United States.

Finamex, said she expects the central bank to increase its reference rate by 50 basis points later this month. “The new shock in commodity prices only worsens the already deteriorated outlook,” she said, Bloomberg News reported. Bloomberg Latin America economist Felipe Hernández said rising and high inflation will “limit policy flexibility and support expectations for the central bank to continue increasing interest rates,” and added that activity is still below Mexico’s “pre-pandemic level and potential.”

BUSINESS NEWS

China’s Three Gorges Eying IPO of Unit in Brazil: Report

Chinese state-run energy giant Three Gorges Corp. may put up its Brazilian unit for an initial public offering as part of plans to expand further in Latin America, Bloomberg News reported Wednesday. Executives at the company were reportedly in talks with advisors in advance of selling shares on the São Paulo stock exchange, unnamed sources told the news service. The public stock offering seeks to raise \$2 billion, much of which will be used to expand in Brazil and elsewhere in the region. The IPO could value the Chinese firm’s Brazilian unit at between \$8 billion and \$10 billion, the sources told Bloomberg News. Three Gorges has been investing in renewable energy assets in Brazil since 2013 and considers it a “priority country” in its international growth strategy, the news service reported. In order to grow sustainably, Three Gorges’ Brazilian unit “has increased its investments to become a clean energy company that is increasingly relevant [and] is currently the second largest power generator in the country with private capital,” the company says on its website. The IPO is still in the exploratory phase, and ongoing market volatility and the looming Brazilian general elections in October could delay the decision to list on the stock exchange, Bloomberg News reported.

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filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, the political disagreements are likely to result in a legislative stalemate. There may be room for small compromises on expanding certain categories of employment-based immigration or creating special programs for immigrants from certain countries such as Afghanistan or Ukraine. Because it has been more than 25 years since Congress last passed major immigration legislation, policymaking will remain primarily in the hands of the executive branch. Courts have also begun to play a key role. Almost every major administrative action on immigration now results in a legal challenge by opposing political forces, hindering effective executive branch policymaking. In short, legislative action on immigration is both absolutely necessary and extremely unlikely. Only a broad political realignment is likely to change that.”

A **Jessica Bolter, associate policy analyst in the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the Migration Policy Institute:** “It appears President Biden may have to rely mainly on executive actions to implement his immigration agenda. He proposed sweeping immigration reform legislation, including a broad legalization of unauthorized immigrants, upon taking office, but it had little chance of advancing. Republicans are staunchly opposed to broad legalization, particularly in the absence of equivalent enforcement expansions, which Democrats are loath to offer after decades of providing increased security funding in the hopes that Republicans would eventually agree to legalization. It may be more possible to enact smaller-bore legislation, such as measures to allow more immigrant health care professionals to work in the United States. If the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program comes under threat of termination by the courts again, lawmakers could feel pressure to provide statutory protections to these Dreamers. Ultimately, Congress’ unwilling-

ness to find consensus on immigration has caused recent presidents to take matters into their own hands. In its first year, the Biden administration took 296 executive actions on immigration, including reducing

“**Congress’ unwillingness to find consensus on immigration has caused recent presidents to take matters into their own hands.”**

— Jessica Bolter

immigration arrests in the interior by revising the categories of noncitizens prioritized for removal, giving more than 500,000 people eligibility for Temporary Protected Status (which provides deportation relief and work authorization) and broadening asylum eligibility. This compares to 86 actions that the Trump administration took in its first year. In the coming year, the Biden administration is expected to restructure the border asylum system, increase regional migration collaboration and further reform detention. While Congress takes a back seat, the immigration system will continue to be subjected to partisan swings via executive action, without undergoing much-needed foundational reforms.”

A **Daniella Burgi-Palomino, co-director of the Latin America Working Group:** “A pathway to citizenship for the beneficiaries of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), or ‘Dreamers,’ and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) is overdue and must be advanced within the U.S. Congress. There is precedent to do so in legislation with the SECURE Act in the Senate and the Dream and Promise Act, which the House of Representatives passed in March 2021 with overwhelming Democratic support. The need

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for permanent solutions for both is urgent. Protections for more than 200,000 TPS beneficiaries from Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua expire on Dec. 31, 2022, leaving these individuals vulnerable to the possibility of detention and deportation if their status is not renewed. Natural disasters such as back-to-back Hurricanes Eta and Iota that struck Central America in 2020 present justifications for renewed TPS designations for Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua, as well as a new designation for Guatemala, which are wholly in line with the use of the TPS statute. While Congress acts, TPS is one tool that the Biden administration has to help the region recover from the lingering effects of these hurricanes and more recent storms and environmental impacts. TPS would allow the citizens of these countries to continue living and working in the United States, to support their families in Central America still suffering from the effects of the hurricanes and to strengthen those countries' economies—benefiting communities in the United States and in Central America.”

A **Louis DeSipio, professor of political science and Chicano/Latino studies at the University of California, Irvine:** “President Biden’s call for immigration reform in the State of the Union address will not lead to congressional action on immigration. Congress has been deadlocked on immigration for the past 20 years and will likely continue to be for the foreseeable future.

Changes in congressional membership in the nine years since the last major effort to pass comprehensive immigration reform have only made these divisions more rigid. The nation pays a price for this chronic failure to reform immigration policies. The challenges that the economy has faced in meeting demand as the nation emerges from Covid-19 include both a human supply chain and a supply chain of goods and services. Many sectors of the economy are unable to secure the workers they need; this labor gap would traditionally have been filled by immigrants, some on short-term visas and some who would enter as permanent residents. Congress has also failed Dreamers and other long-term undocumented immigrants who demonstrated their commitment to U.S. society, a commitment that was particularly evident as front-line workers during the pandemic. Comprehensive reform would address both of these needs—labor and human rights—as well as other aspects of immigration, including new modes of immigration enforcement. With Congress unable to act, President Biden can only fulfill his commitment through the use of executive actions to facilitate immigration and protect long-term undocumented immigrants. These executive actions are by their nature temporary, but they will ensure that the economy can grow and that society can be more just.”

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