

IMMIGRATION REFORM WILL GO FORWARD, SAYS SECRETARY OF DHS.

The Obama campaign promise of immigration reform will be kept in early 2010, according to the administration's top immigration official.

In November, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano announced that the administration will introduce to Congress and the public a proposal for immigration reform and a path to legal status for the undocumented.

In a speech in Washington, Secretary Napolitano described the security and enforcement measures that her agency has taken under her tenure to enforce current immigration laws. After the last campaign for immigration reform failed in 2007, the federal government announced that it would strengthen the security of the borders first, before seeking passage of reform.

The government also released statistics this month showing that the number of persons trying to cross the border with Mexico dropped last year by 25%. The border patrol arrested 556,000 people last year, the lowest in several decades. The number of arrests have steadily declined since 2000, when there were 1.6 million arrests.

The Secretary argued that this was a result of the agency's efforts to secure the border. Staffing of the border patrol has been increased. About 3,500 U.S. Border Patrol agents now work along California's 140-mile border with Mexico. The federal government erected about 45 miles of fencing across the California border last year.

But she said that increased border security is not enough. "While it's important to emphasize the need for immigration reform from an enforcement perspective, the need for reform stretches far beyond those reasons. We have to make sure the immigration system works to support American families, businesses and workers," stated Secretary Napolitano.

The time is now for immigration reform, according to the Secretary. "At the end of the day, when it comes to immigration, people need to be able to trust the system. Americans need to know that their government is committed to enforcing the law and securing the border - and that it takes this responsibility seriously. Law enforcement needs to have better legal tools and the necessary resources to deal with border-related and immigration-related crime. Businesses must be able find the workers they need here in America, rather than having to move overseas. Immigrants need to be able to plan their lives - they need to know that once we reform the laws, we're going to have a system that works, and that the contours of our immigration laws will last. And they need to know that they will have as many responsibilities as they do rights...This Administration does not shy away from taking on the big challenges of the 21st century, challenges that have been ignored too long and hurt our families and businesses."