

Supreme Court Agrees to Hear Arguments Over Obama Administration's Deportations Halt

The U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to hear President Barack Obama's bid to resurrect his plan to shield more than 4 million illegal immigrants from deportation, a unilateral executive action he took in 2014 to bypass the Republican-led Congress.

The dispute, to be argued before the court in the coming months with a ruling due by the end of June, will be one of the centerpiece cases of the court's current term. Obama's executive action was blocked by lower courts after Texas and 25 other Republican-governed states sued to stop it, contending he exceeded his presidential powers under the U.S. Constitution.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, said in a statement that courts have long recognized the limits to presidential authority.

"The court should affirm what President Obama said himself on more than 20 occasions: that he cannot unilaterally rewrite congressional laws and circumvent the people's representatives," Paxton said.

The nine justices will review a November ruling by the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that upheld a February 2015 decision by U.S. District Judge Andrew Hanen in Brownsville, a city along the Texas border with Mexico, to halt Obama's action.

With some of his major legislative initiatives suffocated by Republican lawmakers, the Democratic president has resorted to

executive action to get around Congress on issues including immigration, gun control and the Obamacare healthcare law. The most recent executive action came this month when he acted unilaterally to expand background checks for certain gun purchases.

His executive actions have antagonized Republicans who accuse him of unlawfully taking actions by executive fiat that only Congress can perform.

Obama's November 2014 executive order lifting the threat of deportation against more than 4 million illegal immigrants was directed at people with no criminal record whose children are U.S. citizens.

Those eligible would be able to work legally and receive some federal benefits. States were not required to provide any benefits. The order expanded on a 2012 program that provided similar relief for people who became illegal immigrants as children. That program went into effect, with the government saying that more than 600,000 people successfully applied.

The case raises several legal issues, including whether states have legal standing to sue the U.S. government over decisions on how to enforce federal laws.

The high court added a separate question on whether the president's guidance violates a provision of U.S. Constitution that requires the president to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed."

The case could have repercussions beyond immigration because it would set a precedent for the circumstances under which states can sue the federal government over a whole range of executive actions. Future presidents, Republican or Democratic, could face new constraints on their power if the states win.

The case is one of the most important the Supreme Court will

decide this term, along with a challenge to a restrictive Texas abortion law.

If the court sides with the Obama administration, Obama would have until his term in office ends in January 2017 to implement the immigration plan. With the U.S. presidential election looming in November, it would be up to the next president to decide whether to keep it in place.{eo}

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