

In Oval Office, Evangelicals Press Obama for Immigration Reform

Speaker of the House John Boehner signaled in October that there would be no **immigration reform** this year, an announcement made the same day that some of the nation's most prominent evangelical pastors met with President Barack Obama to try to advance the issue.

Only months ago, **immigration reform** seemed to enjoy strong bipartisan momentum.

It still does across the nation, said Russell D. Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, one of the eight clergy invited to the Oval Office meeting.

"I urged the president not to make this a divisive issue, but to work with House Republicans," said Moore. "We need to work together to fix the system rather than just scream at each other."

The Obama administration, in a statement issued after the meeting, squarely blamed House Republicans for the impasse. The Democratic-led Senate passed a bipartisan **immigration reform** plan in June.

Wednesday afternoon, Boehner said the Republican-dominated House would not take up the Senate bill, which means no **immigration reform** this year.

In their Oval Office meeting, the president told the **pastors** that "there is no reason for House Republicans to continue to delay action on this issue that has garnered bipartisan support," according to a White House statement.

The Rev. Gabriel Salguero, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, said he is not discouraged by Boehner's announcement.

"I'm a **pastor** and I transact in hope," Salguero said, making the case that immigration reform would boost the economy and help keep families together. "**Immigration reform** would be a wonderful Thanksgiving and Advent gift to the nation."

Another pastor in the meeting, the Rev. Jim Wallis of Sojourners, said afterward: "As faith leaders, we know the urgency and the human cost of our broken system and are committed to working and praying until reform passes."

On Tuesday, five **immigration reform** activists, including the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, vowed to fast to pressure Congress into passing an immigration reform bill.

The other clergy who met with the president were: Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle; Joel Hunter, senior pastor of Northland Church; Hyepin Im, president and CEO of Korean Churches for Community Development, Los Angeles; and Mike McClenahan, senior pastor of Solana Beach Presbyterian Church.

Moore said the president asked him to pray at the meeting. Moore led the group in prayers for Obama, Vice President Joe Biden – who attended the meeting–Congress and the nation.