

Persecuted Home-Schooler Asylum Petition Gets 'No Comment' From White House

On Monday, the White House responded to the Home School Legal Defense Association's (HSLDA) petition that a German home-schooling family, the Romeikes, be granted political asylum in the United States.

Uwe and Hannelore Romeike fled their home country after being prosecuted for home schooling, which is illegal in Germany. The White House's response stated that, because the petition "request[s] a particular law enforcement or adjudicatory action, or address[es] a matter before the courts," the White House claimed it could not comment on the issue.

"No one can understand why the White House is showing so much leniency to millions of immigrants who have come here illegally in hopes of securing a better job but is so determined to deport this one family who has come to America in search of freedom for themselves and their children," says HSLDA Chairman Mike Farris.

"This petition was the perfect opportunity for the White House to explain why this administration appealed the original grant of asylum. This was a perfect opportunity for the White House to explain the blatantly unequal treatment being received by the Romeike family. But the White House stalled for four months and said absolutely nothing."

HSLDA's petition for the Romeikes was published on the White House's petition website on March 19 and needed to reach 100,000 signatures by April 18 to receive a response. The petition hit the threshold on April 9 and continued to gather signatures, at one point making it the second-most-signed petition on the website. The White House's response came 125

days after the petition reached the required number of signatures.

“That is an inexplicable and inexcusable delay that raises serious questions about the integrity of the entire White House petition process,” Farris says. “If the White House felt it could not answer this petition because of the ongoing appeal of the administration’s reversal of the original grant of asylum, surely the administration could have said so much sooner. Four months of indecision may be a record, even for the Obama administration.”

On July 15, the Sixth Circuit Court denied HSLDA’s petition to rehear the Romeikes’ case. HSLDA is appealing the case to the Supreme Court.

While the White House says it cannot comment on the case, the White House has responded to petitions that address the legal status of foreign students with advanced U.S. degrees and the Defense of Marriage Act while it was being challenged before the federal courts.

“The White House petition process appears to be little more than yet another opportunity for the White House to push their agenda,” Farris says. “The White House response was neither timely, substantive, nor appropriate.”

What may be more troubling, Farris says, is the White House statement on home schooling in general. The response says the White House knows “home schooling is a popular option for many parents pursuing high academic standards for their children. Home schooling can provide young people with the resources and attention they need to succeed academically, and we understand why their parents value this freedom,” he says.

What is disturbing about this statement, according to Farris, is what the White House doesn’t say about home schooling. “Here is what this statement fails to say: that this administration also values our freedom to home school, that

home schooling can be successful to properly prepare a child socially and emotionally as well as academically, and that the right of parents to direct the education of their children is a fundamental human right. In the same way, Germany recognizes the academic success of home schoolers but suppresses them because of their ideology," he says.

"The Obama administration has argued before our federal courts that Germany's policy is legitimate and does not violate either human rights principles generally or religious freedom specifically," Farris continues. "This White House response to the Romeike petition continues to follow this line of argument. Academic success may be present, but governments are justified in banning home schooling for the purpose of suppressing religious minorities. That is the full position of this administration. And it is unacceptable.

"Accordingly, when the White House simply notes that parents value their own freedom, it stops dangerously short in its statement. Where is the ringing endorsement that parental freedom is a fundamental human right? The White House silence on this point says a great deal."