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At Dayton Immigration Speech, Reform Is The Elephant In The Room

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By LEWIS WALLACE



Demonstrators at a 2010 protest in Washington D.C. demanding immigration reform. Several efforts since have failed in Congress. NEVELE OTSEOG FLICKR/CREATIVE COMMONS

A representative of the White House addressed advocates in Dayton Thursday about their efforts to make immigrants welcome, but immigration reform was the elephant in the room.

The tone of the event, called [Welcoming Economies](#), was positive and focused on immigrants who start businesses. Felicia Escobar, a policy assistant to the president, presented a [White House report](#) on better integrating newcomers.

But one audience member, a young woman from Toledo, asked about the high rate of deportations under President Obama, and Escobar's tone changed.

“We really are operating within the confines of a broken law,” she said.

She says she’s disappointed Congress hasn’t passed sweeping reforms pushed by President Obama earlier in his presidency, and indicated that the Obama administration’s hands are tied in terms of deportation. A recent executive order that would have expanded deportation relief to a larger number of children and adults [remains held up in court](#).

The question-asker, Linda Amrou, says there needs to be more urgency.

“Although we do see positive things like this task force coming to fruition, it’s still an issue,” Amrou said.

Most local efforts to integrate new immigrants include people regardless of their legal status—but because of the risk of deportation, many [still try to stay under the radar](#).

There are an estimated [95,000 undocumented immigrants](#) in Ohio. A [recent UCLA study](#) ranked the state last in the country for policies that protect health and wellbeing of undocumented immigrants.

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