

Law enforcement officials look for immigration changes

By Michael Doyle McClatchy Washington
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Fresno County Sheriff Margaret Mims on Tuesday joined other law enforcement officers at the White House in trying to make an arresting case for comprehensive immigration reform.

But with Congress stalled and immediate Capitol Hill progress extremely unlikely, Mims and her uniformed allies know they must aim long.

“We’re not as close as we have been in the past for Congress to take action,” Mims acknowledged Tuesday morning, “but the message today is, this is important.”

Mims participated in the afternoon White House session as part of the Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force, a group established in January to champion ambitious legislation that covers both border security and legalization.

The task force, in turn, is associated with [the National Immigration Forum](#), an advocacy organization whose lobbying firm, [The Raben Group](#), provided a base of operations Tuesday for the law enforcement officers.

The meeting, scheduled for 90 minutes on the third floor of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building, adjacent to the White House, pointedly included the Obama administration’s chief immigration operators from Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Gil Kerlikowske, to Alejandro Mayorkas, deputy secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

The private session was billed as a “panel discussion.” Moderated by former San Francisco Police Chief [Heather Fong, who now works for the Department of Homeland Security](#), the get-together allowed the airing of both federal and local concerns.

“Effective immigration enforcement directly affects how safe our local communities are,” Mims said in an interview. “For a long time, we in local law enforcement have talked about the need for immigration reform.”

Stressing that immigration reform and border security is “about boots on the ground,” Mims estimated that between 10 and 15 percent of Fresno County Jail inmates are unauthorized immigrants. [Past studies have found](#) California spends more than \$1.1 billion a year to incarcerate unauthorized immigrants in state prisons.

Attuned to the costs, sheriffs from other California counties, including Kern, Santa Cruz and Los Angeles, have joined Mims on the immigration reform task force.

But the high-level participants meeting with law enforcement Tuesday also underscored, beyond immigration issue’s local impacts, the treacherous national political terrain the subject inhabits. Mayorkas, for one, was confirmed in 2013 without receiving any Republican votes in the Senate.

Further highlighting the conflict, Republican Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz of Texas joined more than 100 lawmakers this week in [an amicus brief opposing](#) Obama’s deferring deportation of certain immigrants. An appellate court is now considering a challenge to the policy filed by Texas and 25 other states.

“President Obama’s unconstitutional immigration actions are an affront to the rule of law,” Cornyn said Monday.

The lawsuits are moving faster than legislation. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard oral arguments April 17 on the Texas challenge. A related challenge was heard May 4 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, and the Supreme Court may need to resolve the dispute by next year.

The combined 2016 presidential and congressional election cycles, meanwhile, further undermine the prospects for comprehensive legislation, whose high water mark was Senate approval in 2013. The GOP-controlled House of Representatives ignored the measure, and some initial Senate measure supporters, like Florida senator and Republican presidential candidate Marco Rubio, have since backpedaled.

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