



REPORT ECONOMY & JOBS

The New Era of Executive Action

How President Obama Is Advancing a Progressive Agenda

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On January 14, 2014, President Obama famously said to his Cabinet,

We are not just going to be waiting for legislation in order to make sure that we're providing Americans the kind of help that they need. . . . I've got a pen and I've got a phone, and I can use that pen to sign executive orders and take executive actions and administrative actions . . .and I've got a phone that allows me to convene Americans from every walk of life—nonprofits, businesses, the private sector, universities—to try to bring more and more Americans together around what I think is a unifying theme, making sure that this is a country where if you work hard, you can make it.

While this “pen and phone” strategy struck many as a new direction, in truth, the president was simply doubling down on his use of executive actions. Already frustrated with the pace of legislative progress after Republicans had taken over the House in January of that year, the president launched on October 4, 2011, a series of executive actions under the moniker of “We Can’t Wait.”

Taken as a whole, policies advanced by the Obama White House through executive actions are far ranging. Examples include sweeping immigration reform to better reflect American values, bold action on climate change, boosting wages for many hard-working Americans, helping students better manage student loan debt, enhancing retirement nest eggs, strengthening protections against workplace discrimination, holding education institutions more accountable, promoting greater equality by refusing to enforce the Defense of Marriage Act and prohibiting LGBT discrimination for employees of federal contractors, taking decisive action to open up travel Cuba, and tackling education reform through No Child Left Behind Waivers and Race to the Top grants.

In *The New Era of Executive Action*, The Century Foundation has reviewed the wide range of the Obama administration’s executive actions, and selected several examples that demonstrate the breadth of policy initiatives and strategies for accomplishing its goals. The report provides a brief summary of the executive action, its status and impact thus

far, and a sampling stakeholder's response to the initiative. Although a number are still making their way through the regulatory process, or slowed by legal challenges, many—imbued with progressive values—are already leaving their mark on the country.



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