



## Trump citizenship remarks give immigration negotiators glimmer of hope

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A reported White House plan that could give DACA recipients a path to citizenship over 10 or more years will help those working toward an immigration reform compromise “a great deal,” Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake said Thursday.

President Donald Trump told reporters Wednesday that he plans to introduce a bill giving Dreamers a path to citizenship “over a period of 10 to 12 years,” in exchange for border wall funding, replacing the visa lottery and ending family migration, sometimes called “chain migration.”

It is a turnaround for the president and could remove one of the key sticking points that led to a partial government shutdown over the weekend, when Senate Democrats refused to vote for a budget over the issue.

“We’re going to morph into it, it’s going to happen over a period of 10 to 12 years,” Trump said in his comments. “I think it’s a nice thing to have the incentive after a period of time to become a citizen.”

The White House had not released details of a plan Thursday, but a spokeswoman confirmed on Wednesday that the administration would deliver a “legislative framework” next week that would include a “permanent solution to DACA.”

Flake, in a speech Thursday to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, repeated his call for the Senate to take the lead on immigration reform and not wait for the White House. But in comments after the speech, he conceded that the president’s comments might aid his cause.

“The president helped out those of us that want a citizenship deal, he helped out a great deal,” the Arizona Republican said.

But Flake acknowledged that there is still much work to be done, and others were not optimistic that the president’s words would actually turn into administration policy.

“It could be one of those situations that the president says something off the cuff that doesn’t end up being the administration’s final position,” said David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute.

“I always thought the president had more compassion and concern for the Dreamers than anyone in the administration or his supporters,” Bier said Thursday. “The question is, will he override his advisers?”

Trump announced on Sept. 5 that he would phase out the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, an Obama-era policy that deferred deportation for two years for young immigrants who were brought to this country illegally as children.

About 800,000 people received DACA protection, which let them get work authorization, drive and go to school without fear of deportation. The coverage could be renewed by recipients, so-called Dreamers, who kept a clean record, among other requirements.

But critics called the policy an executive overreach. Trump said Sept. 5 that the government would stop accepting renewal applications and would start canceling protections March 5 – a six-month “wind down” that he said was meant to give Congress time to come up with another solution.

Currently there are about a dozen bills in Congress, sponsored by lawmakers from across the political spectrum. The bills vary significantly in eligibility requirements, conditions for remaining in the country and the time period Dreamers will have to wait before being eligible to apply for citizenship.

None have advanced, however, in part because Senate leaders have looked to the White House to support any measure before it moved forward. But the president has wavered on his support, part of the fight that led to last week’s budget showdown.

The shutdown ended Monday when Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell agreed to allow a DACA bill to move to the floor, with or without White House backing, in exchange for Democratic votes to extend the budget through Feb. 8.

That gives lawmakers just two weeks to take action on DACA before another potential government shutdown.

Flake said senators working on a deal are aiming to get 65 to 70 votes, which he thinks would be enough to sway both the president and the House in support of a DACA fix.

“If it’s going to go through the House, it needs the president’s support, to get the president’s support we got to have 65, 70 votes,” Flake said. “I do think it’s possible, it depends on how expansive we get.”

Trump is characteristically confident that there will be a DACA bill, telling reporters to tell Dreamers “not to worry. We will solve this problem.”

But Bier is not so confident that the end of the DACA debate is near, noting that strong bipartisan support for a bill in the Senate “doesn’t have the same effect on the House that they think it does.”

“If they can get 70 votes in the Senate that will change my calculations from a 5 percent to a 10 percent shot,” Bier said.