



## **Government Shutdown Vote Passes But Can Democrats And Republicans Ever Reach An Immigration Deal?**

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In an 81-18 vote, the Senate voted Monday to fund the government through February 8. The majority of Democrats joined all 51 Republican Senators in voting for the bill after Majority Leader Mitch McConnell promised Democrats a solution for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program before the government shuts down again.

"So long as the government remains open, it would be my intention to take up legislation here in the Senate that would address DACA, border security and related issues, as well as disaster relief, defense funding, health care and other important matters," McConnell said on Monday morning.

But many prominent Democrats in both the Senate and the House balked at the offer, arguing that the GOP is not to be trusted to follow through with the negotiations.

Soon after voting no on the bill, Senator Kamala Harris from California said that it "would be foolhardy to believe that [McConnell] made a commitment" to protecting DACA.

Frustration palpable among Dems: "I don't believe he made any commitment whatsoever," Kamala Harris says of McConnell and immigration, "and I think it would be foolhardy to believe that he made a commitment."

Representative Luis Gutierrez from Illinois, a prominent voice in the immigrant rights' community, also denounced his party's support for the bill, telling reporters on Monday that "when it comes to immigrants, Latinos and their families, Democrats are still not willing to go to the mat to allow people in my community to live in our country legally."

As a new set of negotiations begin to take place this week to prevent the government from shutting down again in three weeks' time, hardliners on both sides of the aisle are likely to have to make some serious concessions.

For Democrats, a path towards citizenship for Dreamers is paramount.

"Democrats and immigrant advocates are singularly focused on protecting Dreamers," Anu Joshi, immigration policy director at New York Immigration Coalition, a prominent progressive immigrant rights advocacy group, told *Newsweek*. "122 DACA recipients lose their protected status every day we don't act."

In exchange, Republicans seek a wide-range of border enforcement measures and sharp reductions in legal immigration.

"The White House put out a list of requirements earlier this year to make this deal happen—mandatory E-verify, border wall funding, an end to chain migration and the visa lottery program, and reigning on sanctuary cities—all of these are necessary for a variety of reasons," Ira Mehlman, spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a nativist non-profit group that seeks to reduce immigration to the United States.

"All of the border security in the world wouldn't solve the problem unless we secure all of these policies," he concluded.

While both Democrats and Republicans in Congress have promised to act in good faith and get a deal done in three weeks, some analysts have cast doubt on whether a bipartisan agreement can be reached at all.

"It's exceptionally unlikely that there will be any kind of deal in the next few weeks," David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, told *Newsweek*. "It's not a matter of a few minor disagreements; it's a fundamental difference of principle."

As evidence, Bier points to Trump allegedly reneging on his support for a deal that included protections for Dreamers together with border wall funding over the weekend.

"Republicans will hold the line in no legalization without a reduction in legal immigration. It motivates the White House and the Trump administration more than anything else," Bier said. "Nativist immigration groups in D.C. don't really care about amnesty or legalization, it's about reducing the number of new immigrants coming into the country."

Ultimately, Bier believes the gap between hardline Democrats and Republicans is too wide for any comprehensive bill to pass both Houses of Congress and ultimately reach the president to sign.

"Hardline conservatives will never support what they see as amnesty for Dreamers and Democrats are probably not going to support any bill that eliminates family reunification policies and doesn't provide a path to citizenship for Dreamers," he said.

Since Trump announced an end to DACA on September, Dreamers and immigrant rights' activists have pushed Democrats to secure some form of deportation relief or a path towards citizenship for the nearly 700,000 so-called Dreamers—immigrants brought into the U.S. as

minors without proper authorization who obtained two-year renewable school and work permits through the DACA program.

Late last week, a bipartisan group of Senators tried to wrangle enough votes for a potential immigration deal that included protections for Dreamers and a slate of security measures favored by conservatives, including billions of dollars to fund a wall along parts of the U.S.-Mexico border.

The group ultimately failed in getting their proposal up for a vote due to lack of support from House Republicans—who sought more drastic cuts in legal immigration and stringent conditions for Dreamers—and radio silence from the White House. With Democrats refusing to bend, the government shut down Friday at midnight for the first time since 2013.

While Congress deliberates what will happen to the Dreamers and American immigration law as a whole, fears of deportation among immigrant communities across the country are widespread.

Last week, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen insisted that federal agencies will not prioritize deporting immigrants brought illegally into the United States as children if Congress and the White House don't reach a deal to keep their protected status.

But many immigrant rights' groups don't trust promises coming from the Trump administration.

“Our communities need more than bold gestures and empty promises. We need action right now. It’s not enough to say pro-Dreamer things and issue strong statements,” Marielena Hincapié, executive director of the National Immigration Law Center, said in a statement released soon after the Senate vote on Monday. “We need a legislative solution that addresses our real needs, without using this crisis as an opportunity to ram through a white nationalist wish list.”