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Hundreds of business leaders call on Trump to protect ‘dreamers’

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Hundreds of business executives -- from Apple, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon and other companies -- are calling upon President Trump to preserve an Obama-era program that allows children brought to the United States illegally to live and work without punishment.

The national coalition on Thursday petitioned Trump to rethink his plans to scrap the five-year-old Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program as early as Friday.

Doing so would imperil the economy and jeopardize the futures of nearly 800,000 young people, known as “dreamers” — 97 percent of whom are in school or in the workforce, they wrote.

At least 72 percent of the top 25 Fortune 500 companies count DACA recipients among their employees, the letter said.

“Dreamers are vital to the future of our companies and our economy,” the executives wrote. “With them, we grow and create jobs. They are part of why we will continue to have a global competitive advantage.”

They have already submitted to extensive background checks. They pay income taxes. Without them, the economy would lose \$460.3 billion from the national GDP and \$24.6 billion in Social Security and Medicare tax contributions, the letter said.

A young woman, who was brought to the U.S. as a teenager, overstayed her visa to get an education. Now she worries what will happen if President Trump repeals DACA. (Whitney Shefte/The Washington Post)

If Trump rescinds the program, it will be employers who would have to implement the policy by policing their workforce and firing DACA recipients, said David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the Cato Institute.

That would impose a massive cost, to the tune of \$6.3 billion, because of worker turnover, Bier concluded in an analysis posted Friday using government data. Companies would have to fire nearly 7,000 employees every week for the next two years, at a cost of \$61 million as week for recruiting, hiring and training 720,000 new hires.

“That’s a really substantial hit that you’re forcing employers to incur as a result of ending DACA,” Bier said in an interview.

But it will be American consumers who will pay the ultimate cost, he said. A contracting workforce would translate into higher prices.

“Really the loser is going to be, more than anyone else, the shopper buying the products that these immigrants are making,” Bier said.

Furthermore, he said, taking away their work authorization would discourage young immigrants from seeking higher education. Salaries will go down, and so will the amount they pay in taxes.

“If you say they can’t work legally, no one is going to finish college and go for advanced degrees. That is going to have a major long-term implication for the economy,” Bier said. “Ultimately you’re downgrading your workforce.”

The letter, organized by Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg's FWD.us and signed by leaders of nearly 400 other companies, also urged Congress to pass legislation that would provide a permanent fix for the young undocumented immigrants.

Among the signatories: business magnate Warren Buffett, fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg, Tim Cook of Apple, Jeff Bezos of Amazon (who owns The Washington Post), Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook, and Meg Whitman of Hewlett-Packard. The companies represent a diverse array of industries, including tech, health care, hospitality, manufacturing and real estate. Marriott International and Starbucks signed. So did General Motors and Crate and Barrel.

"It's a testament to the broad support everywhere," said Todd Schulte, president of FWD.us. "It's the right thing to do for these hardworking young folks who are Americans in every sense except their immigration paperwork status."

Multiple polls have shown that about two-thirds of Americans, including Republicans and Trump supporters, favor protecting "dreamers" in some form.

Trump has signaled his willingness to eliminate the legal protection for these immigrants, but so far has not taken the steps to do so. He has both promised to end the deferred-action program on his first day of office — calling it an unconstitutional abuse of executive authority — as well as vowed to “show great heart” to “these incredible kids.”

If Trump ends the program, the young immigrants would no longer be able to obtain work permits and may be deported.

Zuckerberg, who co-founded FWD.us, wrote a separate post Thursday night urging the government to protect “dreamers.”

“These young people represent the future of our country and our economy,” Zuckerberg wrote.

At Microsoft, at least 27 employees are beneficiaries of DACA, said Brad Smith, Microsoft president and chief legal officer, in a [blog post](#). They are software engineers, finance professionals, and retail and sales associates. Ending the program, he said, would be a “step backwards for our entire nation.”

Microsoft chief executive Satya Nadella wrote in his own [post](#) that “smart immigration can help our economic growth and global competitiveness” in addition to creating more jobs for Americans.

Microsoft, Nadella said, “will always stand for diversity and economic opportunity for everyone.”

Silicon Valley leaders have grown accustomed to challenging Trump's immigration policies, given the tech industries' large reliance on immigrant and foreign workers. They have criticized his promise to crack down on H-1B visas for high-skilled foreign workers and opposed his ban on entry to citizens of six Muslim-majority countries.