



## Moment of reckoning

Steve Roberts and Cokie Roberts

July 27, 2017

President Trump has reached a “moment of reckoning,” says Sen. Lindsey Graham, the outspoken Republican from South Carolina. And he is correct.

The issue is a program created by President Obama called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, which protects immigrants who were brought to this country illegally as youngsters and have lived here ever since.

Since its inception in 2012, the program has been a huge success, enabling about 780,000 youthful immigrants — often called Dreamers — to obtain drivers’ licenses and work permits, go to school, join the military and contribute both their energy and their taxes to their adopted country. Even President Trump, who once vowed to repeal DACA on the campaign trail, has called Dreamers “incredible kids.”

But last month, in a particularly vicious and venal act, 10 Republican state attorneys general wrote to the administration demanding that DACA be rescinded. They threatened to sue if the president didn’t cave to their demands by Sept. 5.

In response, Sen. Graham and Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois, the Democratic whip, introduced legislation to make DACA permanent. “To President Trump, you’re going to have to make a decision,” Graham said. “The campaign is over. To the Republican Party: Who are we? What do we believe? When they write the history of these times, I’m going to be with these kids.”

So are we. And so are many Americans from both parties, who reject the nativist mania behind the AGs’ ultimatum. In an editorial, The Wall Street Journal pointed out the folly of rescinding DACA and deporting Dreamers, stating that these AGs would “dedicate scarce enforcement resources to going door-to-door in a University of Texas dorm,” terrorizing hard-working, law-abiding students.

“The better solution is for Congress to rewrite national immigration law to recognize reality, including that it isn’t a political winner to deport people brought to the country as 5-year-olds,” said the Journal.

That is the “better solution,” but an unlikely one. The Congressional calendar is crowded and the prospects for bipartisanship, on this or any issue, are pretty dim. Meanwhile, the deadline set by the attorneys general is fast approaching.

So the “moment of reckoning” is up to the president. What he should do is announce, once and for all, that he will preserve DACA and let those “incredible kids” get on with their lives, without the fear of deportation hanging over their heads.

Such a position would be a “political winner.” A CNN poll last March found that only 13 percent of Americans believe that deporting undocumented immigrants should be “the government’s top priority.” Sixty percent said the main objective should be “developing a plan to allow those in the U.S. illegally who have jobs to become legal residents.”

But politics is only one argument. Economists have consistently agreed that immigrants — particularly young, job-holding, tax-paying immigrants — contribute far more to the economy than they cost. Ike Brannon, a researcher at libertarian think tank The Cato Institute, has concluded that deporting the Dreamers would require \$60 billion; their absence from the country would reduce economic growth by an additional \$280 billion over the next decade.

The left-leaning Center for American Progress concludes that the cost of ending DACA would be even greater: \$433 billion in lost economic activity. Philip E. Wolgin, a co-author of the study, described the Dreamers’ fiscal value to Politico: “Their ability to now work legally has meant that they’ve been able to be more economically productive and create more economic growth for the areas that they live in.”

Then there’s the moral imperative. The Dreamers signed up in good faith and willingly gave personal information to the government. For the government now to use that information to locate and deport them would be a profound breach of trust.

Sen. Cory Booker, a New Jersey Democrat, says that for the Dreamers, ending DACA would be “just a stunning undermining of their ability to contribute to the country they know and love.”

On what planet does it make any sense at all to defy every rational argument — political, economic and moral — and purge the country of these productive and patriotic residents?

Abrogating DACA, and endangering the Dreamers, would send a series of devastating messages to the rest of the world: America does not keep its promises. America does not understand, nor does it act on, its own self-interest. America is no longer a moral beacon that lives by its own values.

President Trump keeps saying that he wants to “make America great again.” Here’s a chance, a moment of reckoning, for him to keep that promise.