



How Trump Can Repeal and Replace DACA

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The issue of illegal immigration was a central plank in the campaign of President-elect Donald Trump and played no small role in getting him elected to the White House. His populist, "America First" position spoke to the economic anxieties of many Americans, and it could be argued that he has a mandate to make immigration enforcement a key priority in the first year of his presidency.

There are different ways to address immigration, however, and the path Trump chooses will go a long way towards setting the tone for his administration, as well as in defining him as a leader. Handling immigration enforcement in the right way is an opportunity for him to show that he actually cares about solving problems, as opposed to simply scoring political points and managing public perception. And a big part of this opportunity involves how he intends to deal with President Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

DACA was instituted in 2012 as a way to help illegal immigrants who were brought to the United States as young children, and who have lived here for at least five years without acquiring a criminal record. DACA offers temporary protection from deportation, access to work permits, and a path for these people to make a legal life in the U.S. During his presidential campaign, Trump promised to end DACA, as well as President Obama's other executive orders on immigration, through executive action of his own.

There are certainly many real issues with illegal immigration that need to be addressed. The porous borders, the crime associated with some illegal immigrants, the heightened competition for jobs at the bottom of the wage distribution, and an entire community of people forced to live in the shadows is not anyone's idea of an acceptable status quo. But even if we were to accept that Donald Trump's basic position on immigration is correct, simply overturning DACA addresses none of these problems. DACA specifically applies to non-criminals, who only broke our immigration laws unwittingly through the actions of their parents. The program is focused on bringing people out of the shadows and making sure they don't take American jobs by working for less than the minimum wage. Overturning DACA does nothing to seal the border, protect us from violence, or create jobs. The only thing it would really accomplish is to uproot people who have lived almost their whole lives in this country and send them into hostile, foreign environments for the sake of politics.

All presidents have the most political capital at the beginning of their first term, and it spoils rapidly. It is therefore wise to use that time to accomplish the biggest, most difficult tasks. The fact that Trump is blessed with both a Republican House and Senate should not be disregarded. Focusing his efforts on meaningfully securing the border would be entirely appropriate under these circumstances. On the other hand, using up valuable energy on deporting children will only make it more difficult for him to accomplish more meaningful goals later in his presidency.

Even if Trump is convinced that DACA is bad policy, overturning it through executive order makes for bad governance and would set an unfortunate precedent early on. President Obama faced a great deal of criticism for being overly imperialistic in his use of executive branch powers to achieve his goals, whereas Trump repeatedly boasted on the campaign trail about his ability to make deals and work with anyone. Congress has already signalled a willingness to re-legislate DACA. Trump should seize that chance to restore constitutional process to the American government, simultaneously distinguishing himself from his predecessor and assuaging the fears of those who expect him to be an autocrat.

Above all, this is a chance for Trump to bring the nation together. His tough position on immigration has led some to label him as an unapologetic racist and bully. Taking a more nuanced approach to DACA would show critics that he is not without sympathy for the plight of immigrants who didn't knowingly violate our laws. By all means, he can be a tough immigration enforcer, fulfilling his campaign promises and address the aspects of illegal immigration that actually hurt Americans without throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water. This is Trump's opportunity to show that he will govern as a dealmaker, a realist, and a pragmatist, instead of a showboating ideologue with little concern for the consequences of his policies. The question is whether he will seize it.

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