



## **President Trump rolls dice on 800,000 lives | Editorial**

September 5, 2017

When it comes to the fate of undocumented immigrants brought to the United States as children, the ball is now in the court of a Congress that's shown little heart for their plight.

Without question, Congress should set immigration policy. But for two decades, its members have proven themselves unable to move past talk of "amnesty" to address the reality of about 800,000 young adults brought here illegally by their parents. About 30,000 of them live in Florida.

By ending the program that shields these young people from deportation, President Trump has put their lives on hold and rolled the dice on their futures.

On Tuesday, the president made good on his campaign promise to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program, after a six-month "winding-down" period. Rather than make the announcement himself, he deferred to U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions, an immigration hardliner. Sessions took no questions after making his statement at a Justice Department news conference.

Trump has said this is one of his most difficult decisions as president. He's also promised to treat these young people "with heart."

His words appear sincere, but they're not good enough.

The president could have offered DACA recipients, also known as "dreamers," assurances they will not be deported during the phase-out period. He could have urged Congress to pass legislation that protects them and the nation's best interests. He could have committed to only signing a bill "with heart."

Instead, we're left guessing about his intentions.

The president's action gives Congress until March 2018 to come up with a legislative solution, but it was Congress's inability to forge a solution that prompted President Obama to use his executive powers to create DACA in 2012. The program offered temporary protection from deportation to undocumented immigrants who arrived as children, have no serious criminal offenses and who fulfilled other requirements. It also offered renewable two-year work permits.

Whether Obama overreached remains the subject of fierce debate. Earlier this year, 10 state attorneys general threatened to sue the administration unless it ended the program by Sept. 5.

Despite the controversy, it's hard to deny the policy has been a success. Many recipients have become teachers, nurses, medical and law students, or pursued other careers and professions. They have purchased their first cars and homes. Some have started businesses, while others have joined the military. They're paying taxes and contributing to the economy. The conservative Cato Institute estimates a \$280 billion reduction in economic growth over the next decade if these young people are deported. The libertarian think tank says it would cost taxpayers \$60 billion to deport so many people.

The policy allowed these young people to emerge from the shadows and become productive members of society. When given the chance, DACA kids have risen to the challenge.

Not so much the adults in Congress.

Since 2001, U.S. lawmakers have failed to pass various versions of the DREAM Act, which would go beyond Obama's executive order to give young, undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements a chance to permanently legalize their status and become eligible for citizenship. The House approved the latest version of the Dream Act in 2010. The bill failed in the Senate by five votes.

The truth is neither party has been willing to invest the political capital needed to pass sensible immigration reform, protect dreamers and serve the nation's best interests.

Still, there are hopeful signs. House Speaker Paul Ryan has said he favors a measure to give permanent legal status to dreamers. U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina; and Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, introduced a similar bill. And a majority of Americans support helping these young people.

We can only hope this legislation gains swift bipartisan support and reaches the president's desk before March. If Trump has truly found his heart on this issue, he will sign a bill into law — and stand on the right side of history.