

Phasing out of DACA incites fears in students

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As the safety net that came with the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals begins to crescendo down, there are students on campuses around the country who are worrying about their safety.

There are an estimated 790,000 young undocumented immigrants who have been able to receive work permits or deportation relief through DACA since it was implemented via an executive order by former President Barack Obama in August 2012, according to Pew Research Center.

Now, those people are facing an uncertain future as the federal government has decided to phase out the program and replace it with legislation that Congress will decide on within six months, **according to an official White House memorandum**. New work permits will no longer be accepted, but existing permits will still offer the same protection, for the time being.

“Permits will not begin to expire for another six months and will remain active for up to 24 months,” President Donald Trump wrote in the memo. “Thus, in effect, I am not going to just cut DACA off, but rather provide a window of opportunity for Congress to finally act.”

As Texas Tech has a high number of foreign students attending the university, there is bound to be a population of those who are categorized as DACA beneficiaries. That number has yet to be confirmed by *The Daily Toreador*.

Saba Nafees, a graduate student in mathematical biology from Lahore, Pakistan, and DACA beneficiary.

But, within some students who are DACA beneficiaries, there is a bit of doubt that they will have protection against deportation, Saba Nafees, a graduate student in mathematical biology from Lahore, Pakistan, and DACA beneficiary, said.

Most of the reasons cited for the removal of the program were to save jobs from United States citizens, but Nafees refutes that statement.

“To me, logic is logic. DACA people are not taking away jobs from other people,” Nafees said. “Most of us didn’t come here illegally.”

The CATO Institute has estimated that many DACA beneficiaries contribute positively to the U.S. economy, according to research from economist Thomas Church. It is estimated that the contribution from most of DACA beneficiaries would produce a gross domestic product gain of \$512 billion.

It is research similar to Church’s that contradict what Trump and most of his administration believes, Nafees said.

Moreover, there will also need to be a proper reform bill from Congress that would secure the status of these people, she said. However, the possibility that Congress will not be able to come to a consensus is rather high.

“We’ve had an ineffective Congress, meaning they haven’t really passed a lot (of legislation) since 2010,” Miguel Levario, associate professor of history and democratic congressional candidate for District 19, said. “They were unable to pass a health care bill, and immigration being a huge issue, it is unlikely that they can.”

A comprehensive reform bill is unlikely to happen because they are essentially promoting a reiteration of the current DREAM Act, which is a subset of the DACA ruling.

There is also a sense that Trump is working backwards on this legislation because it would be easier to charge Congress with coming up with a new bill and then rescind the old executive order, Levario said.

That is a pessimistic but realistic view for some, Nafees said.

“I don’t know if this is his way with charging Congress to do something, and I don’t even know if he has the votes in his own party to pass a DREAM Act,” Levario said.

Though the DACA program is not geared toward undocumented immigrants seeking higher education, there is a portion that seeks protections, so they may continue their education.

“We’re not criminals, we’re actually doing a lot of good things here,” Christopher Ponce, a senior mathematics major who lived in Austin but was born in Mexico, said. “Hopefully, they can see some of things we’ve been doing: our research, our jobs, things like that.”

But most of the students who are DACA beneficiaries have to jump the hurdle of financing their own college education, Nafees said.

Undocumented students in most cases are not eligible for programs like Free Application for Federal Student Aid, according to www.studentaid.gov. In Texas, however, some undocumented students are eligible to pay in-state tuition rates.

“In terms of why do we overlook blatant facts,” Nafees said, “I don’t know, I think it has do with politics, it has to do with party lines. I think it has to do with always voting for your party, not in terms of logic.”

Around 2011, the state of Alabama passed sweeping immigration laws that cracked down on undocumented immigration, according to *The New York Times*. It was around that same time states like Arizona and Georgia were passing similar legislation.

It was there that many immigrants were working in the agriculture industry, Levario said.

“What they experienced right off the bat was billions of dollars in lost revenue, because of crops rotting away on the vines, for example” Levario said. “They even had an effort to recruit, during the Great Recession of 2008.”

The states’ efforts to recruit workers were not fruitful and economic problems began to increase, he said.

“They weren’t able to not only recruit workers, but the few that did show up, they were unable to retain them,” Levario said.

Local economies took the worst hit because small businesses that started up, which were centered around the immigrant population, were crippled, he said. In 2012, DACA applications for the states of Georgia and Arizona were an estimated combined 52,000 people, according to Pew. That particular data did not include Alabama.

The same data also had Texas with an estimated 21,000 DACA applicants. Halfway through 2017, there were around 200,000 immigrants who renewed their DACA status, according to Pew.

“Honestly starting (Tuesday), we are not protected. ICE could walk in at the university,” Nafees said.

To ease the strain this may take on students, Tech has also started initiatives that would look into protecting DACA beneficiaries. A university-wide letter from Tech President Lawrence Schovanec was sent out to all students, faculty and staff of Tech on Tuesday, Sept. 5.

Schovanec also said in a previous interview with *The Daily Toreador* that after issues began to stem from the Trump presidency regarding immigrants, university officials started looking into possible actions for protecting students.

Schovanec has found it best to take a more behind-the-scenes approach to these kinds of issues, he told ***The Daily Toreador* in an April interview.**

“I understand that some people would wish we would be more strident in our response,” Schovanec said. “But, what we have to do is whenever we hear of any specific instances where a student might feel threatened, we reach out to that particular college and address that.”

As far as Nafees and Ponce are concerned, however, there is more that Tech and its administration could be doing to comfort DACA students.

Pomona University put a list earlier this week of the nearly 700 presidents and chancellors of institutions of higher learning who signed a petition to keep and continue DACA. Among the many signatures is Schovanec’s.

However, there has been little communication between some DACA students and higher administration, Nafees said.

“There are a couple of faculty members and a few people out there who are really, really passionate to protect people like us, whose hearts are breaking, probably more than mine,” Nafees said.

During the summer, while Ponce was working at Oregon Health & Science University, he, along with students enrolled, received a letter similar to the one Schovanec sent out regarding DACA. The Oregon email let students know the university would not release residency information to any federal or state agency.

The only caveat OHSU had was if the immigration status was required by a court order, Ponce said.

“Saying that they would go a step further to protect their DACA students in medical school or employees in a hospital is a lot better than just having our president say, ‘We will comply with all federal and state laws,’” Ponce, a DACA beneficiary, said. “That’s basically saying, ‘We’re going to let our government do what they want to,’ instead of just providing a layer of protection.”

Tech should take more steps to ensure the security of all its DACA students, Nafees said.

There are campus entities available to students, but a firmer statement from administration would increase comfort for most, she said.

“They need to sit us all down, they need to look us in the eye and say, ‘What exactly do you need?’” Nafees said, “instead of saying, ‘Oh, we think we can come up with policies across the system level to work with students like you.’ They need to just look us in the eye, they don’t even need to apologize. We’re already getting enough apologies from around the country.”