

Austin American-Statesman

Commentary: Texas DACA threat neither cost-effective, wise nor humane

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August 27, 2017

Let's be clear: What our country needs is comprehensive, compassionate immigration reform. In the meantime, the threat by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and nine other Republican states to litigate to end the Deferred Action for Child Arrivals (DACA) program is cruel and mean-spirited. It ignores the enormous contributions DACA recipients have and continue to make to our economy and to our communities.

DACA provides temporary protection from deportation and the ability to work and travel for young people who came to the U.S. before age 16 and pursued their education. Since its inception five years ago, DACA has been an amazing success story.

Approximately 790,000 young people hold DACA status; at least 234,000 of them live in Texas. Having worked with these young people for many years, I have personally witnessed DACA's effects on their lives. They no longer live under the constant threat of deportation and may put their educational skills to work. Many are teachers, lawyers, nurses and professionals who are excelling, contributing and giving back to their communities. Others are incentivized to continue their higher education and can finance their studies through their ability to work. A stellar example is a former law student of mine who is now a dedicated criminal prosecutor and public servant.

From a humanitarian standpoint, these youth have a bright future ahead. Ending DACA will destroy families and the aspirations and accomplishments of integrated members of our communities who consider the U.S. their home.

Terminating DACA makes no sense from an economic perspective. Numerous studies across the political spectrum have concluded that the program significantly benefits the U.S. economy. For example, the conservative CATO institute concluded that DACA allowed many recipients to find their first jobs, move from the informal to formal labor market, and increase their earning power — all of which provide significant economic benefits for the country.

CATO also found that deportation of recipients would cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars in addition to lost tax revenues. The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates that undocumented young people now enrolled in — or eligible for — DACA pay roughly \$2 billion each year in state and local taxes. Similarly, the Center for American Progress calculates that

removing DACA recipients from the workforce will reduce our country's GDP by \$433.4 billion over the next 10 years.

For these reasons, lawmakers in Texas and throughout the country, as well as immigration scholars and religious leaders, have urged the current administration to leave DACA intact.

Unfortunately, it seems that the certain sectors of the Republican Party are determined to undo the good that has come of DACA. Thus, nine states, led by Paxton, have threatened to sue the administration if it does not end DACA in early September. Paxton's claim that his threat is not designed to take action against 790,000 young people but to reign in executive power is a disingenuous. If untethered executive action were his target, why didn't Paxton speak out against Trump's broad Muslim travel ban?

In any case, the assertion that DACA is an unlawful exercise of executive power is wrong. Prosecutorial discretion, in the form of deferred action, is an established and lawful immigration policy that has been invoked by numerous administrations over many years. It provides the agency with discretion to develop enforcement priorities and channel limited resources. The Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Arizona* recognized that broad prosecutorial discretion is a principle feature of the federal immigration system.

It is not cost-effective, wise or humane to waste state or federal resources in an improbable effort to end DACA. Terminating the program would thwart the dreams and talents of many deserving people and only serves to pander to political interests and an anti-immigrant agenda. Paxton and others should focus on the priorities and needs of Texans instead of actively trying to destroy the lives of almost 800,000 young people. It is imperative that the Trump administration defend DACA against these attacks.