

# Des Moines Register

## Opinion: Chuck Grassley Should Lend His Support to Fixing Immigration Law

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At a meeting several months ago, I joined numerous Iowans calling on Sen. Chuck Grassley to close an immigration loophole that forces over 250,000 children of legal immigrants to “self deport” after graduating college. A event followed this meeting where numerous other Iowans called on Congress to do the exact same thing.

There was unanimous consensus that this solution urgently needs fixing, and Grassley later provided assurance that a solution could pass at the end of this year if it has “bipartisan agreement on it.”

Such a solution has sponsorship from five Republicans and five Democrats and support from former President Donald Trump, so I’m confused why Grassley hasn’t acted.

This problem is personal to me and countless other Iowans. My friend, Harold Van Beek, was forced to say goodbye to his son, Laurens, last July. I first met Harold shortly after he brought his family here over 18 years ago. Seconds after I set foot into his jewelry store, Harold greeted me with coffee and conversation. He had a knack for treating anybody who walked in his store as if they’re family.

People walk into Harold’s store only expecting jewelry, but what they end up getting is the experience of feeling special. I’ve heard some customers say that Harold’s work “made their dreams come true” after he crafts their wedding rings.

But Harold’s place in our community extends far beyond his business. He also provides meals to the homeless through his work as an Iowa Freemason. Harold’s activism has led to numerous residents throughout the state to become Masons themselves. One of those people was Laurens, who was heavily involved in the Masonic Lodge up until he was forced to leave.

It breaks my heart to see Harold and his wife, Astrid, be separated from their son after fighting so vigorously for him to remain here. Since the day they arrived here, the Van Beeks did everything by the book and broke none of our laws. Despite this, they have no way of applying for permanent residency because the small-business visas that they arrived on doesn’t allow them to. Although Harold and Astrid can keep renewing their visas, our immigration system has no way

for Laurens and the thousands of others who came here on dependent child visas to remain in America after they graduate from college.

This gap in our immigration system poses a dire humanitarian problem, especially given that these young people have been living in America since they were 5 years old, on average. Every year 10,000 people age out of their dependent status and become vulnerable to self-deportation. I was hopeful when Harold met with Grassley and pleaded for him to help enact a solution. But even though a bipartisan solution that allows these young people to remain here was offered as an amendment to an end of year bill, the Senate has yet to include it.

As a lifelong Grassley supporter, I'm thankful for the numerous instances where he puts Iowans first. But the Senate's inaction on this issue has me worried for the roughly 1,000 other young people in Iowa who are being punished with the haunting threat of being forced to leave despite following our laws. Including a fix to this in the defense bill has already garnered explicit support from numerous national security and law enforcement officials, including the Iowa Police Chief's Association's executive director. Recently, a retired minister from West Branch wrote in support of this solution in the Cedar Rapids Gazette, which inspired me to do the same.

If the Senate doesn't pass this reform, then American taxpayers will continue to be deprived of the very investments that helped educate them. According to one estimate from the Cato Institute, American taxpayers will lose over \$30 billion in the next several decades as these young people self deport before they reach prime working age.

Even more importantly, I want Grassley to understand that this isn't a political issue — it's a human one. I had the pleasure of meeting so many talented young people who are working tirelessly to cultivate their skills and in advocating for the opportunity to stay here and use those skills to give back to the communities that invested in their success.

Supporting this bill helps mitigate Iowa's brain drain by encouraging skilled families who built their roots in the state to remain here. The Grassley that I know and have voted for would support this, so I wonder what's stopping him from letting these young people contribute to Iowa. I hope that Grassley, with his power and influence, will join Sen. Joni Ernst and Reps. Mariannette Miller-Meeke, Ashley Hinson, and Cindy Axne in supporting this solution.