



Congress, give Dreamers the opportunity to live the American Dream

Samuel Rodriguez

June 24, 2020

On June 18, the Supreme Court made the monumental decision to uphold the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, protecting nearly 700,000 Dreamers — young men and women who were brought illegally to the U.S. by their parents when they were children — from deportation.

The court's 5-4 ruling brings much needed relief to these young men and women who have been stuck in immigration limbo since childhood. DACA, enacted by the Obama administration in 2012, provided temporary protection and allowed them to work and pursue higher education. But it did not and could not provide them a pathway for residency or citizenship.

These young men and women are American in every sense of the word, except in paper. The United States is the only home they have known. They have built lives here and become productive members of society. They are a blessing to our nation, not a curse, and they should not have to pay for the sins of their parents.

While the Supreme Court's ruling is a momentary victory we should celebrate, we cannot afford to ignore what is still not working: the Supreme Court should not have had to rule on DACA at all.

Protecting Dreamers is — and has always been — Congress' job, not the president's or the Supreme Court's. Over the past few years, Congress has had chances to pass immigration reform legislation that would permanently protect Dreamers. But every time, Congress chose to play partisan politics rather than work together for justice.

President Trump has even said on multiple occasions that he is in favor of creating a path to citizenship for Dreamers. Of course, this has to be done responsibly and with fair parameters. For example, to be granted permanent residency, with an earned path to citizenship within three to five years, DACA recipients must have come to the U.S. prior to 2015 at the age of 15 or less, and must not have been convicted of serious crimes (including identity theft).

Beyond the moral obligation to provide justice to these young men and women, here are two reasons why Congress should address the plight of our Dreamers:

Dreamers contribute to and improve our society.

Sadly, Dreamers are often subjected to demeaning stereotypes. Those who pander to fearmongering claim that Dreamers are criminals, lazy or uneducated. Nothing could be further from the truth.

According to 2018 research from the CATO Institute, “The native-born incarceration rate is 14% higher than the DREAMer incarceration rate, while DACA-ineligible illegal immigrants and legal immigrants have the lowest rates of all.”

What’s more, a report from the New American Economy Research Fund found “the DACA-eligible population earned \$23.4 billion in 2017 alone ... In 2017, we estimate that DACA-eligible individuals paid more than \$2.2 billion in federal taxes, contributions that helped sustain troubled entitlement programs like Social Security and Medicare.”

It is true, our nation has invested a lot in Dreamers. But they have given back just as much, if not more.

Data shows that Dreamers are hard workers — 89% were employed in 2018 — are more likely to start a business and have higher graduation rates compared to other non-citizens.

It is true, our nation has invested a lot in Dreamers. But they have given back just as much, if not more. It is in America’s best interest to support and help these young men and women succeed.

Dreamers are not a problem. They are a solution to our problems.

It is time for a national paradigm shift: We need to stop looking at Dreamers as a problem to be solved, but rather as a solution to our problems.

In fact, Dreamers are already part of the solution to the struggles our country is facing. They are teachers, caregivers, engineers, cooks, artists, lawyers, clergy, social justice advocates, doctors — the list goes on and on. Many Dreamers come from cultures that highly value family and community, the role of faith in society and the freedoms — such as religious liberty and free speech — that allow us to pursue the best life we can for ourselves and our families.

Given the opportunity, Dreamers could help our nation recover from the COVID-19 pandemic — 202,500 Dreamers are currently servicing on the frontlines in the fight against the virus. And they could help us heal the racial divisions that have fractured our communities for centuries.

It’s up to Congress to give Dreamers the opportunity to live the American Dream.

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez is president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, executive producer of “Breakthrough” with 20th Century Fox and bestselling author of “You Are Next: Destroy What Has Paralyzed You and Never Miss Your Moment Again” (Charisma House Publishing).