

The Fresno Bee

U.S. Senate must act to protect Dreamers and give them their rightful stake in America

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“Why are you even looking at colleges if you can’t go?” That was the question Carlos’ high school guidance counselor asked him back in 2007. Despite his good grades and his desire for higher education, college was unimaginable for Carlos. He was undocumented.

However, when President Obama launched the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012, Carlos seized his chance to come out of the shadows and enroll in a 4-year university.

Now, with a degree from Fresno State’s Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology Carlos is an agronomist at a family owned farm in Kingsburg. He uses his expertise to increase crop yields while shrinking the operation’s carbon footprint. He’s making a life for himself and bringing Central Valley agriculture into the future. It’s a classic “only in America” story; at 31, he’s the type of go-getter any business wants and needs to succeed in the 21st century.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of protecting Dreamers. In California alone, 56,000 DACA recipients are currently working vital front-line health-care jobs; they are first responders, doctors, and nurses saving COVID patients. Many others, like Carlos, are essential workers combating food shortages.

They make a significant economic contribution to our country, as well. A 2017 study showed that Dreamers pay more than \$3.87 billion in taxes per year; and research from the Cato Institute revealed that deportation of these critical workers would cost the country \$60 billion in taxes and reduce economic growth by \$280 billion over the next decade. There’s no debate — our country would suffer without Dreamers in the work force.

For Carlos and the other 650,000 DACA recipients in the United States, living with DACA means living with uncertainty. The program was ended by President Trump in March 2018 with a mandate that Congress pass legislation to address their current and future status within the next six months. Unfortunately, the Republican-led 115th Congress failed to act, which placed all the Dreamers into limbo and, distressingly, subject to immediate deportation.

Fortunately, last week the U.S. Supreme Court stepped in to provide a temporary respite by overturning Trump’s order to end the program. That is absolutely a relief. But, notably, that decision was based on legal technicalities, not on the program’s merits.

The spike of COVID-19 cases in the Central Valley shows how marginalizing Dreamers puts our health at risk. In the middle of a pandemic, taking doctors and nurses out of hospitals is the last thing we should do. This would be especially dangerous for our communities. Recently, the state had to divert a shipment of 100 hospital beds meant for Fresno County because we don’t have

enough doctors to care for more patients. Deporting doctors and nurses isn't just irresponsible, it's deadly.

The only way to end this nightmare is through permanent legislation. Last year, the Democratic-led 116th Congress passed H.R. 6, the American Dream and Promise Act. This legislation provides a permanent path to citizenship for Dreamers as well as people with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) holders.

The bill is a necessary step towards a more just and humane immigration system. It is how we move forward to meet our work-force needs and enrich our nation. Dreamers are serving in the armed forces, studying and working alongside us, teaching our kids and starting their own families here. Many have only known the United States as their home. It's past time to provide them the consideration, recognition and respect they deserve. It's time we recognize that Dreamers are every bit as American as any child born in this country.

The American Dream and Promise Act has been sitting on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's desk since June 4, 2019 and remains awaiting action in the Senate.

We can't turn our backs on these students, professionals, community members, and hard-working families. The Senate will be in session until August. On behalf of the thousands of Dreamers here in California and across the nation, we are asking you to join us in calling, writing and emailing the Senate to demand consideration and passage of this vital legislation.