



## Fact check: Sen. John Cornyn ad says he 'strongly supports legalization for Dreamers'

October 6, 2020

Brandon Mulder

**The claim:** “While Senator Cornyn is for secure borders, he strongly supports legalization for Dreamers.” — Ad for Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas.

The 30-second ad began airing in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin and the Rio Grande Valley on Sept 12. In it, a voice-over describes the senator’s position on Dreamers.

**PolitiFact ruling: Half True.** It’s true that Cornyn’s voting history has supported the legalization of Dreamers, but there are also examples of his opposition to bills that package Dreamer protections with other items.

U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, released a Spanish-language [campaign advertisement](#) in September that says the senator “fights for all Texans,” including immigrants who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children, known as Dreamers.

There’s no doubt that Cornyn has voiced his support over the years for protecting young Dreamers from deportation. “In America, we don’t hold children responsible for the mistakes their parents made,” Cornyn has said. And his aides point to numerous occasions when he has cast votes on bills designed to provide Dreamers a path to citizenship.

Nonetheless, immigrant advocates and Cornyn’s Democratic detractors are quick to highlight other occasions when legislation with Dreamer protections was scuttled or opposed by the senator. A clear picture of Cornyn’s voting record on Dreamers, however, is tangled in the messy politics of immigration reform.

The most popular form of legislation aimed at granting conditional permanent resident status to young immigrants was introduced in 2001, known as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, or DREAM Act. In 2003, during his first year in the Senate, Cornyn and a majority of the Senate Judiciary Committee approved a version of the act. But the bill went no further.

At that point, Cornyn’s voting record on the DREAM Act and Dreamers becomes more mixed. In 2007, another version of the act was derailed after Cornyn and a majority of senators supported a procedural move that defeated it.

In 2013, Cornyn opposed a broad-based immigration reform bill crafted by a bipartisan group of senators that would have provided a pathway to citizenship for 11 million immigrants living in the country without authorization, including Dreamers. Cornyn said at the time he opposed the bill because it lacked border security components.

In 2018, during the latest congressional showdown over funding for President Donald Trump's border wall, Cornyn cosponsored the Trump-backed Secure and Succeed Act while opposing a bill backed by a bipartisan group of senators known as the Common Sense Coalition.

Both efforts would have offered a path to citizenship for 1.8 million Dreamers and allocated \$25 billion for a southern border wall, but the bills differed in other ways.

The Secure and Succeed Act would have canceled the Diversity Visa Program, which awards green cards via a lottery, and limited family-based immigration to spouses and unmarried children under 18. According to the libertarian Cato Institute, these moves would have reduced legal immigration by 44%.

The bipartisan "Common Sense" plan would have prohibited parents from using their Dreamer children's newly granted citizenship to apply for citizenship themselves, according to a bill description on Sen. Susan Collins' website.

Neither bill was successful.

Cornyn's voting record on the DREAM Act, however, is not the only metric by which his support for Dreamers should be measured, said Cornyn's spokesman Drew Brandewie. And Brandewie pointed to numerous occasions when the senator has expressed his support for Dreamers.

"I am sympathetic to their plight," Cornyn said in 2019, "and I want to work to find a solution that would allow them to become American citizens."

The language used in the advertisement — that the senator "strongly supports legalization for Dreamers" — should be interpreted narrowly so as not to include his position on the DREAM Act itself, Brandewie said.

For example, in 2017 Cornyn was part of a bipartisan working group that sought a solution for Dreamers after the Trump administration signaled its intent to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals — a move that has been held up in the courts.

In 2018, Cornyn criticized a lawsuit that Texas and six other states filed to end DACA. Cornyn said the suit provided no solution and that the state needs the "pool of very productive, good young people" being protected by DACA from deportation.

"One can support legalization without supporting or voting for the DREAM act," Brandewie said.

But to Frank Sharry, executive director of the progressive immigrant advocacy group America's Voice, making a distinction between supporting the DREAM Act and supporting Dreamers is splitting hairs.

“He technically can say he’s voted for the DREAM Act, but it’s his opposition that’s the major feature of his career,” Sharry said.

Cornyn’s ad is “hoodwinking Latino voters into thinking he’s for a priority in that community when he spent the last 15 years undermining it,” Sharry said.

Cornyn said during an interview Tuesday with the American-Statesman’s editorial board that the stalemate on Dreamers and the tendency for bills to get packaged with other items “is probably my single greatest frustration and disappointment.”

“It’s sort of like a Christmas tree. People keep adding different things to it and it almost always seems to collapse under its own weight,” Cornyn said.

The version of the DREAM Act currently before Congress could provide a pathway to citizenship for more than 2 million Dreamers. Cornyn opposes the legislation because it would give Dreamers access to federal student financial aid that’s not available to citizens — a provision that Brandewie said is “wholly unrelated” to the legalization of Dreamers.