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'Dreamers' help make America great - don't deport them

The economic cost to our nation of ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program would be enormous.

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President Donald Trump has stated on many occasions that his administration would go after “bad hombres” and “dangerous criminals” when it comes to enforcing immigration laws. Yet federal immigration agents in Seattle recently arrested DACA recipient Daniel Ramirez, and he is still being held in detention. As is often the case in such situations, the circumstances of Ramirez’s arrest are contested, but one thing is clear: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) owes Ramirez and all of us an explanation.

For the Latino community and much of the country, the larger issue is that a policy of detaining and deporting recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is a violation of Trump’s own campaign promises, as well as basic common sense.

Having been brought here as infants or young children, DACA recipients are the antithesis of “bad hombres.” DACA recipients have graduated at the top of their high school classes, excelled in college and served with distinction in our military; they know no other country but the United States. As recipients of DACA, they have also been vetted extensively, going through a months-long process that included background checks and substantial fees.

The DACA program has also been a boon to this country, and all Americans would pay a price if it ended. Studies of DACA recipients show how much they can contribute to this country: many are nurses, caring for the sick and elderly, others volunteered for Teach for America, working with disadvantaged students. Immigrants brought illegally into the United States as children — so called “Dreamers” — have bought homes, started businesses and pay taxes. The economic cost of ending DACA would be enormous, not the least of which would be losing the benefits of our educational investments in them. The Center for American Progress recently estimated these potential wasted economic benefits to be a staggering \$433.4 billion in gross domestic product over the next decade, including more than a billion dollars of lost economic growth in Washington every year. Were the Trump administration to decide to try and immediately deport

an estimated 750,000 current DACA recipients, the nationwide cost would grow by some \$60 billion, according to estimates from the Cato Institute.

As if the economic losses to our country aren't enough, deporting DACA recipients would shatter a solemn commitment made with our society. They graduated from school, stayed out of trouble, came forward to get right with the law, and paid a \$465 fee, which covered every cent of the program's expenses, meaning not a penny came from taxpayers. In return, our government agreed to provide protection from deportation and the right to work legally in the United States. Arresting, detaining, or — God forbid — deporting DACA recipients would break that commitment.

The wiser course would be to extend DACA and uphold the American dream for more than three-quarters of a million, earning more than a half-trillion-dollar bonus for our economy over the next decade and saving American taxpayers millions of dollars. To achieve this, all President Trump needs to do is instruct immigration agents to follow the law. The program will remain in place as long as he chooses not to revoke it.

And it would be in line with what he has promised. Just after his inauguration, President Trump offered what seemed to be reassuring words when he told ABC News, "They shouldn't be very worried. I do have a big heart."

Protecting DACA would demonstrate, in deeds and not just words, that the president really meant it.