

Cincinnati 'Dreamer:' 'These are the people who get things done'

Byron McCauley

September 15, 2017

Mauricio Vivar, 21, of Cincinnati, has a message for Congress and for President Trump: Codify the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, and pass comprehensive immigration reform.

Vivar is among those undocumented immigrants brought here by their parents as a child. Understandably, Vivar seems more interested in the long view. He wants to become an American citizen one day. He wants to see his four siblings to thrive and be productive citizens in the only country they have ever known.

He is remarkably poised about what's going on in Washington, and about how decisions by politicians may impact his family and the families of more than 800,000 others now protected by DACA.

The Trump Administration last week ended a 2012 Obama Administration program that allows undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as minors to remain here as adults.

In announcing the decision recently, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a former U.S. senator from Alabama, said Obama's DACA executive action circumvented immigration laws and was unconstitutional.

And then Sessions added a healthy dose of ethnic antagonism to stoke the flames of perceived economic injustice: "It also denied jobs to hundreds of thousands of Americans by allowing those same jobs to go to illegal aliens," Sessions said.

Alfonso Cornejo, president of the Hispanic Chamber Cincinnati USA, called the move "inhumane and economically harmful" at the time, citing the 500-700 young people in Greater Cincinnati.

Vivar, who now lives in Greater Cincinnati, fits the bill.

He spent the first five years of his life in Puebla, Mexico, before his parents came across the border of Southern California. Today, he works at a local warehouse and helps his dad out in the family's business. Even as the president and Congress hash out a deal on DACA, Vivar's resolve has been strengthened. The St. Bernard High School graduate has dreams for his future in the United States, DACA or not.

"They know that for their plans to go forward, they need the backing of a large group of people because (we) come here with the sense of the responsibility that 'I have to give back,'"

Vivar said of the president and Republicans in Congress. "These are the people in this country who get discriminated against the most, but these are the people that get things done."

This point is reinforced by Cornejo, who told me the Trump Administration's decision seemed to reflect a pattern of discrimination toward Hispanics and others. He cites a CATO Institute study that shows ending the DACA program would cost the U.S. economy \$280 billion over the next 10 years.

An April study by the nonpartisan Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy showed that Ohio has 5,060 DACA recipients who pay \$14 million in state and local taxes. Kentucky's 3,380 DACA recipients paid \$9 million in state and local taxes.

"This is not a country where we pay for the sins of the fathers," Cornejo said. "It's not humane to do something like this. These are people who are paying taxes, and you're going to drive them into an underground economy. These individuals have already become dynamic contributors to our American economy, and play an important role in our communities."

Meanwhile, Vivar is counting on Washington lawmakers to make their decision based on what immigrants offer to the country and less on what they take.

"When all of this is in the past, I hope that it is remembered for being the right decision," Vivar said. "We want people to feel that way after this decision, not the other way around."