

## US business mourns after Dreamers deal dies

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As Congress prepared to address the future of the country's young undocumented immigrants last year, the US Chamber of Commerce pointedly put up posters at its headquarters lauding modern-day and historic immigrants, including Alexander Graham Bell and Henry Ford.

"America. Built By Dreamers," read the signs, which were positioned outside the Chamber's headquarters — directly across from the White House.

For months, US businesses and trade groups have been trying to cajole politicians into resolving the status of 1.8m so-called Dreamers, immigrants brought to the country illegally as children, of whom 700,000 were given work permits under an Obama administration policy that has been cancelled by President Donald Trump.

This week, the politicians came up short.

On Friday, the Senate broke for a week-long recess having failed, by just six votes, to pass bipartisan immigration legislation that would have given a path to citizenship for the Dreamers and funding for Mr Trump's promised border wall.

The White House had been pushing a wider agreement that, in addition to a Dreamer amnesty and the wall, would also have reduced legal immigration, but that garnered even less support, pitching the political process into newly uncertain territory — and leaving Dreamers in limbo, along with the businesses that have employed them.

"I've been very worried for quite a while that I was watching a train wreck in slow motion, and yesterday we had that train wreck," said Tamar Jacoby, president of ImmigrationWorks USA, an alliance of small businesses that rely on immigrant workers.

The bill's failure came after months of lobbying by trade association and business groups, most of whom had thrown their weight behind the bipartisan bill.

"We have people who are working here contributing to our society. Many of them are in the manufacturing sector," said Jay Timmons, president of the National Association of Manufacturers. "We don't want to lose those folks. And frankly our country shouldn't want to lose those folks — especially in manufacturing where we have 364,000 open jobs."

Some 91 per cent of the 700,000 Dreamers who applied for permits under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (Daca) programme are currently employed, and more than two-thirds of them moved to a job with better pay after securing their permits, according to a survey last year by the Center for American Progress, a think-tank close to the Democratic party.

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think-tank, has estimated that if the federal government forced employers to fire all Daca recipients it would cost businesses \$6.3bn in worker turnover costs.

More than 80 per cent of Americans support giving Dreamers permanent residency in the US. However, Democrats and Republicans have shown little sign of being able to coalesce around broader immigration reforms. Republicans say they will not support a bill that deals only with the Dreamers' fate. The party insists it must at least address the question of border security.

Still, others are holding out hope that Senate leaders can rally the additional votes behind the bipartisan bill, though such a bill would then need to pass the more conservative House and be signed by the president, who has shown no signs of supporting any bill that would not also meet his demands to curb legal immigration as well.

“The Senate came within six votes of passing a bipartisan solution that provides relief for Dreamers and institutes responsible border security enhancements,” said Neil Bradley, chief policy officer of the US Chamber of Commerce. “We saw [on Thursday] there is a path to 60 votes, and we urge the Senate to take it,” he said referring to the supermajority a bill needs to pass the 100-person Senate.

While the Daca programme was set to end on March 5, two court rulings have undercut this deadline. Two federal judges have blocked the Trump administration from cancelling the programme, meaning Dreamers could continue receiving permits until at least the end of next month.

Both the House and Senate have now broken for a week-long recess. On their return, House Republicans have said they plan to vote on a Republican bill that closely mirrors the White House proposal, but its likelihood of success is slim, to say the least. Even Republicans say this bill is a tough sell in the House and doomed in the Senate.

Ms Jacoby of ImmigrationWorks USA said one possible solution for the Dreamers would be a “skinny two pillar” proposal would comprise billions of dollars of wall funding in return for legal status for just the 700,000 Daca recipients — instead of the 1.8m who were eligible.

“It’s not that I think that’s right. It’s the sweet spot as I see it,” said Ms Jacoby, whose members include hotels, restaurants and construction companies that employ Daca beneficiaries.

Mr Trump’s most recent comments suggest he would not support such a deal, but Ms Jacoby added: “The question is, after defeat, is he more willing to accept a compromise.”

She noted that immigration as an emotive issue that had roiled US politics for years and inspired numerous ill-fated efforts. “In immigration there is a long history of the cat dying then coming back to life,” said Ms Jacoby. “I’m not sure how many lives it takes. Whether it’s nine or less.”