



The Weekly Gab – DACA: An exercise in executive outreach

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For the first time since its implementation in 2012, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) has dominated the news cycle. In just under two weeks, President Trump has both rescinded and promised to save the Obama-era program; on Sept. 5 the Justice Department announced the end of DACA, but Trump reversed course shortly after, with Democratic leadership announcing on Sept. 13 that they had reached a deal with the president to extend protection for qualifying undocumented immigrants.

As Democrats ran a victory lap, many Republicans met the announcement with cautious optimism, drawing the ire of the president's hard-liner base. Still, among the respective celebration, and lamentation, it seems as though all sides are missing the bigger point: the political turmoil surrounding DACA and the subsequent struggles to either save or destroy it are direct, preventable consequences of executive overreach.

President Obama passed DACA via executive order five years ago, when Congress failed to come up with much needed immigration reform. In other words, a president purposefully circumvented Congress's constitutional authority to enact a law, and was able to get away with it solely because it was politically palatable.

This is by no means a viable way to make sweeping, systematic policy changes – especially when it comes to something like immigration, which demands meticulous debate. For any president to take unilateral action on such a grand scale is unacceptable, and as we can now see, creates more problems than it solves.

That is not to say that DACA itself is an undesirable policy. After all, the idea that children should not be punished for their parents' actions is a quintessentially American value. There are also obvious economic benefits to allowing the 800,000 immigrants currently protected by DACA to stay in the country. A study by the Cato Institute, for example, found that they largely resemble H-1B visa holders; they are bringing skilled, specialized labor to the country. Nearly three quarters of DACA recipients are pursuing higher education and as a group they contribute billions of dollars to the economy in taxes and commerce.

All together, the Brookings Institution put the cost of deportation at \$800 billion – a hefty price to pay to expel a group of people who spent the greater part of their lives essentially functioning as tax-paying, law-abiding American citizens.

Still, it is impossible to ignore the simple fact that DACA has caused so much trouble because of the means by which it was enacted. Congress is meant to function slowly and meticulously, even if that process is politically unpopular. While the president does have some authority when it comes to immigration, issuing such a broad executive order very clearly goes against the framers' original intention of how this country is meant to function.

In the worst of cases, this simply creates a temporary solution to a permanent problem and, as evidenced by the current situation, the second round of debates is often much more painful than the first – both in regards to optics and in regards to consequences on actual human lives.

Ideally, this will serve as a wake-up call to an American public that has grown increasingly comfortable with the continuous expansion of executive power. And as for Congress, lawmakers in both parties would now be best served to focus on passing lasting immigration reform and reclaiming the power that was rightfully theirs in the first place.