



The Battle for the Dignity of Work

Luz Vega-Marquiz

September 15, 2017

As we headed into Labor Day weekend, I found myself thinking not only about the powerful history of the labor movement in America, but about the crisis facing nearly 800,000 immigrants slated to lose their right to work unless Congress counters President Donald Trump's recent decision to end the DACA program.

There is a steep and sobering human cost to the president's decision. It threatens to tear hundreds of thousand of people from the only country they have ever known, disrupting their families and the lives they are building. More than 90 percent of the recipients have jobs, according to [research by Tom K. Wong](#) and others. Under the program, the majority have been able to move to jobs with better pay, brighter long-term prospects, and improved working conditions. Without a DACA, not only will workers - and their families - lose these hard-won gains, they won't be able to work at all.

Ending DACA will leave many industries already facing [worker shortages](#) in even deeper trouble. Also, the federal government would lose \$60 billion in tax revenue during the next 10 years, according to the Cato Institute. Meanwhile, [Center for American Progress](#) estimates that if DACA workers lost their work permits and thus their jobs, the U.S. gross domestic product would be reduced by \$433.4 billion over the next decade.

Bad for workers; bad for business; bad for the economy. Is this really what we want?

At a time when voices of division clamor from all sides, it is also important to pause to appreciate victories that workers are winning around the country. Here are just a few examples:

- In the heated debate over immigration policy, the crucial role immigrants play as workers across a range of industries is often forgotten. With the support of groups, including [Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#), [Haitian Women of Miami](#) and the [Florida Immigrant Coalition](#), union activists are working to bring attention to the pressing need to extend the Temporary Protected Status program, which allows foreign nationals to stay in the country legally if they are unable to return to their home country safely. The protected status for 320,000 immigrants is currently set to expire at the end of this year.
- [LAANE](#) Executive Director Roxana Tynan [argues on HuffPost](#) that the federal government's promised infrastructure initiative should support "game-changing projects" rather than simply

lining the pockets of private companies. One model is LAANE's own efforts in Los Angeles, which include partnerships with labor, community, and environmental groups to create green jobs targeted to those facing barriers to employment that also enhance the city's power and water infrastructure.

- In Mississippi, women make just 75 cents to a man's dollar for the same work. Black women make even less. That's why the Mississippi Women Economic Security Initiative, a project of the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative, is pushing for an equal pay law to curtail what they aptly call "daylight robbery on the job."

At the local, state, and national level—whether advocating for a living wage, equal pay, safe working conditions, or respect for the diversity of American workers—Marguerite Casey Foundation grantees are fighting the long battle for the dignity of work.