

# LINCOLN JOURNAL STAR



## **Local View: Dreamers must be protected**

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More than 3,400 Nebraskans have become pawns in a political battle that may result in their deportation, commencing in less than two weeks. They are among the nearly 800,000 “Dreamers” brought to this country as undocumented children.

When President Obama entered an executive order creating the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, young immigrants who registered with DACA were given a protected status allowing them to work or attend school or college. To participate in the program, they had to reveal their identities and other personal information and meet certain requirements.

In September 2017, President Trump rescinded the Obama order, effective March 6, 2018, ostensibly to give Congress time to codify DACA. A Washington Post survey indicated 86 percent of Americans support Dreamers, and most members of Congress say they want to protect them.

Because of the intransigence of Congress and the president in not extending DACA, we are within a week of the date on which deportations of the Dreamers can commence.

Dreamers are temporarily protected by two federal court cases that stay any termination of DACA until a final decision, and by a February 26, 2018 procedural decision of the U.S. Supreme Court declining consideration of a direct appeal by the government.

Deportation of the Dreamers would create an economic disaster. The Brookings Institute estimates the cost of deportation of one individual to be \$12,500, with a \$10 billion total for the 800,000 persons who have participated in DACA. In contrast, the total Immigration and Customs Enforcement annual budget is \$5 billion.

Additionally, Center for American Progress statistics estimate the loss of Dreamers would cause a reduction in the national GDP of \$433 billion over 10 years; Nebraska would suffer a loss in GDP of \$146 million over that time.

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Ninety-seven percent of the Dreamers are students or are currently employed, and 72 percent of those in school are in higher education, with many working on advanced degrees. Others now serve in a variety of professions or employment requiring high technical skills. Dreamers pay

federal, state and local taxes. The study reflected the average income for Dreamers younger than 25 rose 70 percent after completing their educations, and 84 percent for those older than 25.

Dreamers do not deprive Americans of jobs. A Cato Institute study showed their average educational level is similar to those of persons having H-1B visas — that require at least bachelor's degree level or superior technical skills. Thus, most Dreamers have the professional, IT or other qualifications for positions where additional personnel are needed. An American Bar Association article notes a member of the Canadian parliament is exploring legislation to accept Dreamers if they are deported from the United States.

Dreamers are not strangers. They are members of our children's athletic teams, debate team partners, officers in student government and honor students. They are what the Crete school system described as the "irreplaceable" teacher, inspiring students to excel academically and be effective community members; the dynamic University of Nebraska honor graduate who implemented mentoring for immigrants taking the citizenship exam, resulting in a 100 percent pass rate; the computer programmer who writes sophisticated codes for the U. S. Navy; and the heroic Dreamer who drowned saving others in the Hurricane Harvey flood.

Ironically, one of the "pillars" of President Trump's plan is a system that admits the most successful and intelligent immigrants. He is now prepared to deport 800,000 immigrants who meet those criteria — and who have an immense devotion to this country.

This is the only home that most Dreamers know, and they want to remain here as productive members of our communities. Deportation is a costly alternative financially and in terms of loss of human resources, and deportation of the Dreamers without just cause is contrary to our American principles.

We must not lose Dreamers because of partisan political infighting. We must take action to ensure that they remain in our country with a path to citizenship, and must not continue the state of uncertainty that presently exists for them.

I urge you to immediately contact Nebraska Sens. Deb Fischer and Ben Sasse and your representative — Jeff Fortenberry, Don Bacon or Adrian Smith — to express your support of a standalone bipartisan bill that will codify the DACA program and provide a path to citizenship.