



Senate leaves ‘Dreamers’ in limbo

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WASHINGTON — The Senate left “Dreamers” in limbo Thursday, rejecting bipartisan compromises that included a pathway to citizenship for them and then delivering a strong rebuke of a White House proposal that offered protection from deportation in exchange for major changes in legal immigration.

A week devoted in the Senate to charting new immigration policy and replacing the expiring Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program ended in a spectacular impasse with rejection of deals weeks in the making, among them a bipartisan proposal authored in the House by San Antonio Republican Rep. Will Hurd.

President Donald Trump deployed veto threats and aggressive lobbying to defeat the Hurd plan and another bipartisan proposal, even though the second plan included the \$25 billion the president wants to build a wall along the Mexican border.

In a form of payback, the Senate delivered fewer votes to the package Trump proposed — which included a path to citizenship for 1.8 million DACA-aged immigrants — than for any other immigration plan. About 120,000 Dreamers live in Texas.

The president’s plan won just 39 votes, far short of the 60 needed to advance.

“I think it’s safe to say it’s been a disappointing week,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said.

“Even though the week has been squandered, this does not have to be the end of our efforts to resolve these matters. I would encourage members to put away the talking points, get serious about finding a solution that actually can become law,” he said.

But as it stands, no clear pathway exists for resolving the threats to some 700,000 undocumented young immigrants, who could lose protections March 5 depending on court action.

Congress doesn't return to Washington until Feb. 26, and deep divisions also exist in the House about fixing DACA and sorting through Trump's far-reaching demands.

A White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, was asked what might happen to DACA recipients once their protection ends. The official said: "We prioritize the removal of criminal aliens, those that are national security threats and those with final order of removal. But that does not mean we will ignore others in the country illegally that we come in contact with."

In the Senate, Trump's proposal stood little chance of passage despite adding 1.1 million DACA-aged immigrants to the pool of young immigrants who would be given a path to citizenship.

Even skeptics who acceded to the White House request for \$25 billion over 10 years for a border wall and other security measures would not accept changes in decades-old policy that would cut legal immigration by 40 percent, according to an estimate by the libertarian Cato Institute.

And some of the 14 Republicans who voted against the president's proposal did so because of the proposed grants of what they regard as amnesty.

Texas GOP Sen. Ted Cruz, who earlier Thursday asserted in a Fox News interview that Republicans "quite likely" would lose control of Congress if legislation passed giving Dreamers a path to citizenship, took to the Senate floor to lecture fellow Republicans.

"Today, far too many Senate Republicans are staking out a place far to the left of President (Barack) Obama's DACA," he said, a reference to protections to 1.8 million DACA-aged immigrants.

"Why on earth would we double and nearly triple the DACA population?" Cruz asked, using the word "amnesty" repeatedly during the speech. He voted no.

Texas Sen. John Cornyn, the Senate's No. 2 Republican, supported the president's plan. He said before it went down that he was "shocked" at how the week unfolded and referred to the ongoing plight of the undocumented young immigrants.

"How do you look them in the face and say we squandered this golden opportunity, perhaps a once in a lifetime opportunity? That's what this week is about," he said.

Hurd's legislation, which has drawn 54 co-sponsors in the House equally divided between the major parties, drew four Republicans and all but one Democrat in a 52-47 vote, eight short of the required three-fifths majority.

His legislation, which remains alive in the House, combines DACA protections with his "Smart Wall" border security provisions. It was sponsored in the Senate by Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Chris Coons, D-Del.

Coons referred to "misrepresentations and half-truths" aimed at the legislation, many from the Trump administration, which went so far as to say it would increase illegal immigration and give "convicted alien felons" a pathway to citizenship.

“Our bill is more than just a set of policies, it is a way to agree when we can agree and not let our disagreements get in the way of progress,” he said. “Would a true American hero and patriot like Sen. McCain have lent his name to this bill if all these attacks were true? I think not.”

The White House orchestrated a blistering assault on a second bipartisan compromise that fell six votes short of advancing despite drawing eight GOP backers. It added a relatively modest change to the system of family-based immigrant visas to a DACA fix and \$25 billion for the border wall and security.

A day after Homeland Security officials slammed Hurd’s plan, the agency mounted an attack on the new compromise by calling it “the end of immigration enforcement in America” and pressed GOP sponsors to withdraw their names.

In a seven-page release, the agency in charge of border security called the bipartisan deal “a mass amnesty bill for illegal aliens of all ages” that would prevent deportation of “teenage human smugglers, gang members or criminal aliens.”

GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., one of the sponsors, called the Homeland Security release offensive and blamed it on “extreme characters” and “crazy people” who have Trump’s ear on immigration.

“I said, ‘Who the hell wrote this?’ Because it sounded like something that came from a political hack,” Graham said.

“Mr. President, you’re being led down a path where we won’t get a result,” Graham added. “This is the best shot you’ll ever get.”

An administration official, who refused to be identified, spoke angrily about Graham, calling him an “obstacle” to immigration reforms.