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Ending DACA: A Wake Up Call

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Five years ago, Pres. Barack Obama, through executive action, established a program known as Deferred Action for Children of Arrivals (DACA). The program permits undocumented immigrants who came to the United States illegally as children to remain in the country with a renewable two-year work permit—provided they arrived prior to the age of 16, have resided in the country for over five years, and are high school students, high school graduates or military veterans.

Though Pres. Obama described the program as “not a permanent fix,” his program did, according to the Pew Research Center, extend work permits and deportation relief for nearly 800,000 young undocumented migrants. Earlier this month, however, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the program will no longer be taking applications under the Trump Administration; additionally, the program will shut down in six months provided Congress doesn’t pass legislation to keep the program in some form or another.

We at *The New Paltz Oracle* renounce the Trump Administration’s decision to eliminate the DACA program. These children of immigrants—referred to as “Dreamers,” after the repeatedly unsuccessful DREAM Act—did not willfully break the law. They did not operate with malicious intent, nor did they have much of a choice in their country of migration. For many of these Dreamers, the United States is the only country they’ve ever known and the only country with which they’ve ever been able to identify. To send these people back to their country of origin, one their parents may have been trying to escape and one to which the Dreamers themselves may have very little attachment, illustrates a serious moral failing in the executive branch.

But beyond the issue of morality, cancelling DACA would also be enormously impractical. A study by the conservative Cato Institute found that “DREAMers [sic] are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans with the same age and education,” and that, on the whole, “DREAMers are less crime prone than native-born Americans.” One might already logically assume this, since criminal penalties for non-citizens can often include deportation, which creates larger consequences for non-citizen offenders in comparison to citizens who offend.

Furthermore, these Dreamers would be deported from a system to which they themselves contributed. The Institute on Taxes and Economic Policy found that repealing DACA authorization would “reduce estimated state and local revenues by nearly \$800 million,” whereas a path to citizenship would actually add “nearly \$505 million in additional state and local taxes, increasing total contributions to at least \$2.53 billion a year.” Since the program began, DACA recipients have collectively contributed roughly \$2 billion in state and local tax revenue.

A lot of that tax money doesn't even go back to them. Dreamers are blocked from receiving financial aid for college; despite this, nearly 40 percent of Dreamers over the age of 25 "have a bachelor's degree or higher," according to a national survey fielded by United We Dream, the National Immigration Law Center, the Center for American Progress, and the University of California, San Diego. Dreamers are also prohibited from receiving healthcare through the Affordable Care Act or Medicaid, meaning that if they want health insurance, they must purchase it out of pocket or obtain it from an employer. Many have opted for the latter route, as the same survey revealed that 93 percent of Dreamers above the age of 25 are employed.

Not only are these people Americans in principle, they are among our best Americans. That is why we at *The New Paltz Oracle* believe that the decision to end DACA is an example of the Trump Administration cutting off the nose to spite the face. Not only is their decision cruel and callous, it's also wildly self-destructive and devoid of pragmatism. The best possible action Congress can take is to finally pass the DREAM Act, which has been bouncing around the Senate in some form or another since 2001 and would grant a path to citizenship for these Dreamers. But if the Trump Administration insists on ending DACA, our legislative branch, at the very least, has an obligation to protect Dreamers by reinstating DACA before the six-month period ends.

Reasonable immigration reform is important, but strictness should not supersede sensibility. Draconian policies and initiatives like the discontinuation of DACA not only serve to undermine our immigrant population, but also disservice the country as a whole. By all accounts, these DACA recipients are an embodiment of the American Dream: law-abiding, hard-working and self-sufficient. What does it say about us that, in spite of all that, we won't take them?