

Jeff Sessions Spews Nativist Lies While Explaining Why Trump Is Killing DACA

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On Tuesday morning, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that, in six months, the Trump administration **will terminate DACA**, the Obama-era program that allows young undocumented people brought to the United States as children to live and work here legally. Sessions could have given a straightforward speech that criticized the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program's alleged legal infirmities and urged Congress to legislate a solution. Instead, he slandered DACA's nearly 800,000 recipients in nativist language with barely concealed racist undertones.

Many Republicans have **made clear** in recent weeks that they **favor the basic policy** DACA enshrined, and merely oppose its executive implementation. Sessions, who **helped persuade Trump** to kill the program, is not one of those Republicans. In his remarks, he directly denounced the very *idea* of granting any kind of amnesty to undocumented individuals brought to the U.S. as children through no fault of their own. At the heart of his speech were two lies, straight from *Breitbart*, explaining why DACA must end:

The effect of this unilateral executive amnesty, among other things, contributed to a surge of unaccompanied minors on the southern border that yielded terrible humanitarian consequences. It also denied jobs to hundreds of thousands of Americans by allowing those same jobs to go to illegal aliens.

Let's examine these falsehoods in turn.

First: Sessions claimed that DACA "contributed to a surge of unaccompanied minors on the southern border." This allegation, often touted by far-right xenophobes, **is false**. A **study** published in *International Migration*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, found that the surge in unaccompanied minors actually began in 2008. (DACA was announced in 2012.) The authors pointed to a host of factors contributing to this phenomenon, including **escalating gang violence** in Central America, as well as drug cartels' willingness **to target and recruit children** in Mexico. But the study found that DACA was not one of these factors. Its authors concluded that "the claim that DACA is responsible for the increase in the flow of unaccompanied alien children is not supported by the data."

Even without the study, it should be obvious that DACA played no role in this surge of unaccompanied minors because the theory itself makes no sense. Undocumented children who arrived in the United States following DACA's implementation would not qualify for the

program. **Only those individuals** who “have continuously resided in the United States since June 15, 2007” and “were physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012” could receive DACA status. Why would parents send their children to the U.S. to participate in a program in which they are not legally permitted to participate?

Second: Sessions alleged that DACA has “denied jobs to hundreds of thousands of Americans by allowing those same jobs to go to illegal aliens.” This line is obviously drawn from the **false narrative** that **immigrants steal jobs** from American citizens. There is no actual evidence that DACA recipients have taken jobs from any Americans, let alone “hundreds of thousands.” There is, however, strong evidence that killing DACA will significantly damage the economy—a fact that Sessions conveniently omitted from his speech.

Once DACA is fully rescinded, its former recipients will lose their work permits (and thus their jobs) and face possible deportation. According to the left-leaning Center for American Progress, **about 30,000 people** will lose their jobs each month as their DACA status expires. The loss of these workers could reduce the national GDP by **\$280 billion** to **\$433 billion** over the next decade. According to estimates by the libertarian Cato Institute, DACA’s demise will cost employers **\$2 billion** and the federal government **\$60 billion**. Trump’s decision to end DACA isn’t a job-saver; it’s a job-killer.

Toward the end of his speech, Sessions praised the RAISE Act, a Republican-backed bill that would **tightly curtail** immigration into the U.S. Sessions claimed the act would “produce enormous benefits for our country.” In reality, the measure marks an effort to return America to an older immigration regime that locked out racial and ethnic minorities. Sessions has **praised the 1924 law** that created this regime—a law whose chief author declared that his act was meant to end “indiscriminate acceptance of all races.” On Tuesday, Sessions revived this principle in slightly more polite language.

The attorney general’s utterly gratuitous defamation of young Latino immigrants tells you everything you need to know about the decision to kill DACA. Before Tuesday, the Trump administration seemed eager to frame its DACA decision as respect for constitutional separation of powers: Congress, it insisted, not the president, must set immigration policy. But after Sessions’ speech, it is difficult to view this move as anything other than an attempt to implement the white nationalism that Trump and Sessions campaigned on.