

## **A dream deferred: The clock is ticking on DACA**

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In a nation of more than 320 million people, a small group of just 800,000 sit squarely in the crosshairs of a controversial proposal that could end their dream of American citizenship and possibly erode the underpinnings of the American Dream itself.

Back in 2012, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy was enacted through executive action by the Obama administration to provide a renewable two-year deferral against deportation for minors who illegally entered the U.S. as minors.

Largely seen as recognition that these children didn't come of their own accord but had largely been raised as Americans, the program's intent was to more efficiently enforce existing immigration law by redirecting resources away from such low-priority criminals.

Eligibility requirements for DACA allowed only applicants that had entered the United States before their 16th birthday, were no older than 30 as of June 15, 2012, had lived in the U.S. since at least 2007 and had no felonies or "serious" misdemeanors.

At the time, it was estimated that perhaps 1.7 million people could qualify for the program, which is so closely associated with the failed Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act that its applicants are called "Dreamers."

According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services data, almost 850,000 people had applied by June 2016; 88 percent had been approved, 7 percent were denied and 5 percent were still in the application process. More than half live in California or Texas, most are still in their 20s, and the overwhelming majority aren't yet 30 years of age.

President Barack Obama attempted to expand the program in 2014, but 25 states with Republican governors successfully sued to block the expansion, as well as a similar program called DAPA that would allow parents a three-year deportation exemption.

When an Anton Scalia-less Supreme Court heard the case in 2016, it deadlocked at 4-4, leaving a lower court's temporary injunction in place.

On Sept. 5, 2017, President Donald Trump rescinded DACA, meaning applications for the program can no longer be considered.

However, there remains the problem of what to do with the 800-some thousand people who after committing a crime by entering the U.S. illegally followed the law and applied for DACA, paying \$495 for the privilege.

Trump has now offloaded the mess to Congress — via U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions — which has six months to figure out how to deal with these Dreamers; if no solution is adopted, their permits will expire and they'll be subject to deportation.

### **A raisin in the sun**

Upon entering the race for president, Trump adopted a surprisingly aggressive anti-immigration posture, famously calling Mexican immigrants rapists and saying that he'd build a border wall that Mexico would ultimately pay for.

He's also vowed to greatly expand the U.S. Border Patrol and has threatened so-called "sanctuary cities" with myriad sanctions.

So it's safe to say that illegal immigrants must threaten both the social fabric and economic prosperity of the United States, right?

Wrong.

Even the Washington, D.C.-based Cato Institute — a notoriously conservative, libertarian think tank founded in the '70s by Charles Koch — acknowledges the fallacy of such positions.

DACA does not incentivize illegal immigration, because only those who have been in the U.S. since 2007 are eligible to apply for relief from deportation.

DACA does not, as Sessions postulated, take jobs from Americans because the number of jobs in any economy isn't fixed.

DACA does not, as Sessions further postulated, adversely affect American taxpayers because recipients aren't eligible for food stamps, Medicaid, monetary assistance or anything else of the sort.

DACA does not, as Sessions continued to confabulate, contribute to crime. In addition to the background check required of Dreamers, a simple arrest regardless of conviction is enough to strip Dreamers of their protections.

Since 2013, only about 450 people a year — totaling just over 2,100 of the estimated 800,000 Dreamers — have seen this happen.

Further research published by UCLA's Institute for Research and Labor Employment as well as by the Journal of Public Economics shows that DACA increased wages and labor force participation. According to the University of California-Davis and the Associated Press, American workers suffer no ill effects from DACA, which most economists agree is actually a boon to the U.S. economy.

A heavy load

According to the Migration Policy Institute, California is home to a larger DACA-eligible population than any other state, with 561,000 people eligible as of 2016. Texas is a distant second, followed by New York, Florida, Illinois, Georgia and New Jersey.

North Carolina ranks eighth with 66,000 eligible out of more than 10 million residents, the majority of whom are concentrated in Wake, Mecklenburg, Guilford and Forsyth counties.

Nevertheless, President Trump has chosen to elevate the issue above more pressing domestic and international concerns like health care and the North Korean nuclear program.

Trump's fellow Republicans — like N.C. Senators Thom Tillis and Richard Burr — applauded his decision to end DACA but have drastically different positions on what needs to happen now.

Tillis, in an op-ed published by Fox News Sept. 7, called DACA a “textbook case of executive overreach” in that it was implemented by executive order rather than through legislation; he's probably right, as a group of Republican attorneys general have threatened to resolve the issue in the courts if Trump doesn't.

He has, however, offered a head nod to the George H.W. Bush administration by demanding a “compassionate, conservative” solution to Dreamers who've obeyed the law since entering the U.S.

Burr agreed with Tillis on the “overreach” sentiment, but proposes enactment of the very same comprehensive immigration reform bill offered up during the heady days of Bush's presidency; he's been consistent in this position for some time now, saying that he looks forward to “working with [his] colleagues in Congress to address this issue in a sensible way as the Founders intended, not by executive fiat, but by carefully crafted legislation that best serves all Americans.”

Congressman Mark Meadows, R-Asheville, said he supports Trump's action but sides closer to Burr than Tillis in that comprehensive immigration reform is the only way to deal with Dreamers; that immigration reform, Meadows maintains, must include Trump's proposed border wall.

Meadows said he expects some sort of action by the end of February; meanwhile, a White House memo released Sept. 5 advises Dreamers to “use the time remaining on their work authorizations to prepare for and arrange departure from the United States.”