



'Dreamer': DACA changed everything for me. Removing it would be a mistake.

Victor Cuicahua

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On June 29, a coalition of 10 Republican states led by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sent a letter to the Trump administration regarding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Created by former President Obama in 2012 through executive order, it gave limited legal status to over 750,000 undocumented immigrants and the opportunity to pursue dreams once hindered by their immigration status. The message of the letter was simple: Rescind it or be prepared to defend it in court.

Two months after signing Paxton's letter, Tennessee Attorney General Herbert Slatery III withdrew his support and admitted that rescinding DACA is much more complicated. There is a human element to it, he wrote, and it should neither be lost upon us or ignored.

Critics argue that rescinding DACA is about upholding the rule of law. But this is simplistic. Its fate will affect millions of lives, whether it is those of its beneficiaries, their families or their communities. My life reflects this complex reality.

Seventeen years ago, I sat in the back of a taxi driving away from the Greyhound Bus Station in downtown Birmingham. My parents are children of farmers in rural Mexico. Both were forced to leave school as teenagers to support their families. Their education was a dream deferred, and they brought me to Alabama as a child to enable mine.

Education was the cornerstone of my life. One of my earliest memories after arriving was seeing a yellow school bus drive past my window and wondering when I could be one of their students. My father often came home in paint-stained overalls and stared absentmindedly at the wall until he fell asleep on the couch. I was eight, and dreamed of attending college to color in the gaps in my parents' hopes of a better life.

But I was undocumented, and that was a much heavier weight than I could carry.

It is common to imagine DACA recipients as "dreamers" whose accomplishments or lofty professional ambitions justify their future in this country. But on the night of my high school graduation, I had neither. I felt I had no future. The absence of a Social Security number and my inability to pay tens of thousands of dollars in international tuition prevented me from attending college. My graduation was the emptiest moment of my life.

Two years later, DACA changed everything. It allowed me to work in cramped restaurant kitchens across Birmingham for 60 hours a week to save for an education that was expensive but no longer inaccessible. It allowed me to become the first undocumented student at the University of Alabama, from which I later transferred to one of the best colleges in the country. It allowed me to imagine returning to Alabama as a history teacher after graduation, ready to serve a future generation of students.

But the rescindment of DACA closes the door to a classroom I had hoped to enter for years. It reminds me that my commitment to the only home I have ever known can be secondary to the shrill cries of those who mistakenly believe that my existence is an affront to theirs. It reminds me that my future in this country is limited by a Social Security Card that reads in capitalized letters, “VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION.”

The fate of DACA does not only concern me or others like me. According to the Cato Institute, its repeal would cost the federal government \$60 billion in lost revenue and the national economy \$215 billion in lost GDP. In a recent Morning Consult survey, almost 4 in 5 registered voters believe DACA recipients should be allowed to remain in the country. A majority of Americans understand that rescinding DACA only hurts us all.

Political leaders across the aisle also understand that the fate of DACA recipients is tied to our nation’s future. House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senator Orrin Hatch, both Republicans, recently urged President Trump not to rescind the program, and pushed Congress to pursue legislation to protect them.

The issue before us is not one of dry legality but of who we want to be as a nation. It is an opportunity for us to uphold the values we cherish most by investing in our future and continuing a program that enables the potential of thousands. Until Congress finds a permanent solution, DACA is worth saving.