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DACA: A Republican dilemma

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Fox News, effectively state TV for the anti-immigration hawks in the administration, incorrectly reported on Thursday that President Trump had decided to end DACA. White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders later denied the report, saying Trump had not yet made a decision. The false report nevertheless stirred conversation, especially among Republicans in Congress, about the wisdom of threatening with deportation approximately 750,000 young people who came here as children, have lived productive lives and came forward to identify themselves under President Obama's executive order.

Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) says he is prepared to introduce legislation to secure DACA. In Wisconsin today Speaker of the House Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) told a local radio station that he believes "President Obama did not have the legislative authority to do what he did." Nevertheless, he said, "Having said all of that, there are people who are in limbo. These are kids who know no other country, who were brought here by their parents and don't know another home." He added, "I really do believe there needs to be a legislative solution, that's the one we are working on, and I think we want to give people peace of mind." He also let it be known he's had "plenty" of conversations with the White House.

That may be the most responsible, sanest thing he has said since Trump was elected. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) chimed in today as well. "I've urged the president not to rescind DACA, an action that would further complicate a system in serious need of a permanent, legislative solution," he said. Hatch and Ryan join a growing list of Republicans opposed to doing away with DACA.

Voters by nearly 80 percent in some polls favor DACA. Mass deportation has always been extremely unpopular, and if young, innocent and hardworking neighbors, friends and colleagues become the target there would surely be an uproar. A recent study from the Cato Institute found, "The average DACA recipient is 22 years old, employed, and earns about \$17 an hour. The majority are still students and 17 percent are pursuing an advanced degree. By contrast, most recipients of H-1B visas are between 25 and 34 and hold either a Bachelor's Degree or a Master's Degree. In short, they appear to be a close reflection of what DACA recipients will look like a few years from now as they complete their educations." Moreover, since DACA screens out those with a criminal record and bars them from receiving welfare benefits or Obamacare subsidies, the usual (exaggerated, and largely false) accusations leveled by anti-immigrant types about immigrants apply. Moreover, "the fiscal cost of immediately deporting the approximately 750,000 people currently in the DACA program would be over \$60 billion to the federal government along with a \$280 billion reduction in economic growth over the next decade." In sum, revoking DACA would be monumentally stupid politics and policy.

The irony could not be greater. The DACA executive order, which Republicans vowed to overturn, may now be turned into a statute, passed by Republican majorities and signed by a Republican president who was elected on a noxious platform of xenophobia and white grievance. For a decade, right-wing anti-immigrant groups and politicians have labeled anything other than mass deportation “amnesty,” although proposals like those of the Gang of Eight have included requirements for a fine, payment of back taxes and English-language fluency along with border control. At a time when Trump is threatening to shut down the government over a useless wall along the southern border, we may wind up with no wall (today Trump backed down from his threat to shut down the government to get funding for the wall) and legislatively protected “dreamers.”

Just like repeal and replace of Obamacare, Republicans’ stance on immigration has been unpopular and unworkable (deporting millions of people by force?), not to mention inhumane. It’s one thing to tout these things when you are out of power — as a cudgel against Democrats and moderate Republicans — but it is quite another to vote for it and live with the consequences when you are in power.

It will be interesting to see how super-duper anti-immigration hawks like Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) (who’s pleading with colleagues for hurricane-relief funding) and Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) will vote if this comes to a vote. Their inclination will be to grandstand and vote with the anti-immigrant mob, but considering how unpopular DACA revocation would be, they might want to reconsider. Those who vote to round up 750,000 or more of these young people will confirm they are unworthy of higher office and representative of a kind of GOP that deserves to go out of business.