



As DACA ends, tech faces uphill political battle to save Dreamers

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The tech industry is leading the charge to pressure Congress to pass a bill to protect so-called Dreamers from deportation. But how effective will the push be?

President Donald Trump announced Tuesday that he's making good on a promise to **officially end the Obama-era program** Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or **DACA**, which lets immigrants brought to the US illegally as children before 2007 stay without fear of deportation. The decision to rescind DACA could affect as many as 800,000 Dreamers, nicknamed after an earlier, failed piece of legislation.

The Trump administration said the program would get six months before the Dreamers lose their right to work and live in the US, giving Congress time to craft a legislative solution to the situation.

But that's a short window, considering how long the saga has gone on in Congress. For 16 years, advocates have tried -- and failed -- to pass legislation to protect these young immigrants from deportation.

Now, with so many lives hanging in the balance and a looming deadline, supporters of new legislation are in crisis mode. The tech industry, **which has gotten more vocal about this issue**, would seem to inspire hope that new legislation can be crafted.

But experts say that even with the backing of notable executives like Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Apple CEO Tim Cook, the fight is an uphill battle, given the fiercely anti-immigrant current running through the Republican party and the decadelong history of false starts on legislation protecting Dreamers. The prospect that the tech industry might make little headway on DACA, despite Silicon Valley's impact on other political issues, underscores the struggle faced by proponents of immigration reform.

"Technology leaders do have a good amount of influence in Washington," said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst at the Washington-based Cato Institute. "But getting this Congress to pass any legislation on this issue is a long shot, even though the majority of Republican voters and the population in general in this country are in favor of it."

Tech's support for immigration

For years, the tech community has pushed for immigration-friendly policies. Traditionally, its biggest concern has been for policies supporting immigration of skilled workers, people that American tech companies say they need to keep their competitive edge.

As early as 2013, executives such as Zuckerberg spoke out about protecting the legal status of Dreamers. He said he was inspired to take up this issue while tutoring undocumented students. In 2013, he started the **FWD.us** group to lobby for pro-immigration policies and broad immigration reform.

There's new urgency thanks to that six-month deadline.

Business leaders in industries across the economy have weighed in with support. Executives from companies like Wells Fargo, AT&T, Hyatt, Best Buy, Univision, Edison International, Ikea and Kaiser Permanente have recently **joined tech executives in calling for Congress to take action.**

"I've never seen more people activate on immigration than I've seen in the last 24 hours," said Todd Schulte, president of FWD.us. "Leaders from every sector of the American economy and people across the country are energized to get Congress to pass a bill that will make sure 800,000 workers aren't forced out of a job."

It makes sense that industry would be standing up and demanding action, Shulte said. DACA participants make up a sympathetic cohort. Most of them, now in their early to middle 20s, have been in the US since they were 6 years old or younger. They've grown up in the US. They've been educated in American schools, speak fluent English and have been integrated into the culture and fabric of American life. It's often been said that they're American in every way except their legal status.

There's also the basic economic sense of not wanting to increase the unemployment level, which could have real consequences for tech companies always on the lookout for talent.

A **study by the Center for American Progress**, meanwhile, estimated that the loss of all DACA workers would reduce US **gross domestic product** by \$433 billion over the next 10 years.

"People, especially those in the business community, know this is an emergency," Shulte said. "Every day that DACA doesn't exist starting March 5 means a loss of 1,400 jobs for people working in every major company in America."

Tech influence in Washington

The **tech industry** holds special sway in American and global politics. When they travel to the US, world leaders routinely schedule visits with the VIPs of Google, **Apple**, Facebook and **Intel**. When he was US president, **Barack Obama** **made frequent trips** to **meet with executives** and even **dined at their homes**.

Silicon Valley has used that clout to push for policies that help its reputation and bottom line, in areas such as cybersecurity and tax policy.

Its biggest victory was in 2012, when internet companies like Google helped defeat the **Stop Online Piracy Act**, or SOPA, in the House and the **Protect IP Act**, or PIPA, in the Senate. These bills, backed by major media companies, would have curtailed the illegal downloading

and streaming of TV shows and movies online. But tech companies argued the bills would have given media companies too much power to shut down sites they claimed were abusing copyrights.

Tech companies like Google and Netflix also played a major role in pushing the Federal Communications Commission to adopt strict net neutrality regulation to prevent wireless and broadband companies from gaining too much power on the internet.

More recently, tech execs have spoken out on social issues, such as protecting rights for women, the LGBTQ community and other minority groups.

Trump, who ran his presidential campaign on the promise he'd bring jobs back to the US, has courted the support of tech leaders. But the relationship has been a rocky one, with **executives increasingly speaking out against his policies and actions**, such as the immigration travel ban, the transgender military ban, and his seeming support for white supremacists and Nazis following a rally that turned violent in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Now there's DACA.

Skeptics say tech will make little headway since the issue is a political football kicked around by both parties.

It's also easier to destroy than it is to create.

"Lobbyists are really good at defeating legislation," Nowrasteh said. "But almost all special interest groups in this city are overrated when it comes to pushing forward policy."

The political reality

The good news: Politicians on both sides agree DACA protections must be reinstated.

Prominent Republican senators, like John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, have criticized Trump for his repeal of DACA and have said something must be passed to protect the young immigrants.

In an appearance on **"CBS This Morning" on Wednesday**, Republican **Gov. John Kasich of Ohio** pointed out that legislation is already teed up in both the House and Senate to get this issue resolved quickly.

Still, immigration is a thorny issue in America these days. And even though the Dream Act is mostly supported by a large numbers of lawmakers in both political parties, it's often been used as a bargaining chip for other legislation, even as more moderate lawmakers hope for a "clean" bill that just addresses DACA.

For now tech companies have vowed to help the Dreamers in their ranks, from offering financial support to connecting them to immigration experts.

But if the tech world wants to enact change, it will have to get more organized and vocal than ever before. And do it fast.