

# The Washington Post

## Trump just handed the fate of ‘dreamers’ over to an extraordinarily dysfunctional Congress

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President Trump has handed over the fate of 800,000 young adult undocumented immigrants to Congress.

Put another way: He just asked a GOP-controlled institution that can't agree on the most basic of conservative policies — such as repealing Obamacare, or passing a budget, or raising the debt ceiling — to pass legislation that affirmatively protects undocumented immigrants.

In other words, don't hold your breath, “dreamers,” that Congress is going to act in time to keep you protected from deportations. This Congress is dysfunctional even when trying to move on something Republicans all agree on. Protecting dreamers has its Republican supporters, but it also has some adamant detractors.

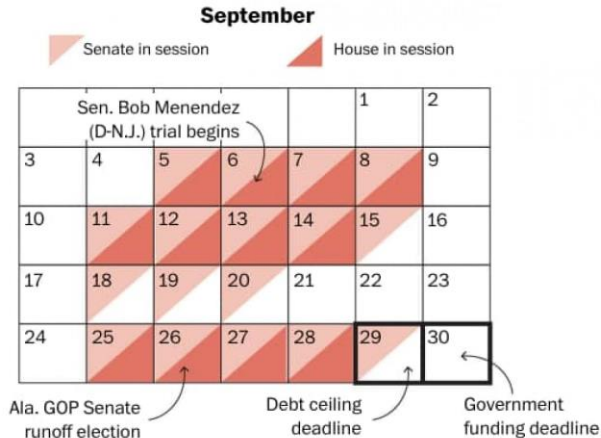
“They can't come together for things they agree on,” said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy expert with the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute. “It's going to be very difficult to bring them together for things they don't.”

*[Both sides gear up for political fight as Trump prepares to end immigration protections for ‘dreamers’]*

The root of the problem is that Congress is divided into three parties: Democrats, traditional Republicans and Trump Republicans. And the two Republican parties have very different ideas of a politically winning argument on immigration. A sampling of the two sides:

Ending DACA now gives chance 2 restore Rule of Law. Delaying so R Leadership can push Amnesty is Republican suicide. <https://pgj.cc/NOJypx>

Time is another massive hurdle. Trump will let President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals phase out in six months. But even before he tossed DACA to lawmakers, Congress comes back to work Tuesday facing a to-do list straight out of legislative hell. It has to fund the government, raise the debt ceiling, pass Hurricane Harvey aid, and reauthorize a bunch of federal programs, including the National Flood Insurance Program, by the end of the month. Oh, and Republican leaders want to get started on a very difficult tax-code overhaul debate.



### Congress's pressure-cooker September

Congress is really good at kicking the can down the road, so many of these battles could take the rest of the year to wrap up.

By the time Congress could get to immigration restructuring without the threat of a government shutdown, it will be 2018 — also known as an election year for members of the House of Representatives, also known as the time politicians play it safe by playing base politics.

If Congress waits to consider DACA protections in 2018, “that would be virtually impossible,” Nowrasteh said. “The last time that Congress passed any kind of immigration liberalization in an election year was 1990, and that was not nearly the toxic environment that it is today. Not even close.”

The Trump administration is rescinding Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. The Obama-era program granted two-year work permits to nearly 800,000 undocumented immigrants brought into the country as children. (Jenny Starrs/The Washington Post)

Congress isn't entirely hopeless on dreamers, though.

Dreamer advocates don't need all Republicans to support legislation protecting them, just enough. Nearly all, if not all, Democrats in Congress support protections for dreamers. In the House, DACA advocates would need to find just 24 Republicans to join Democrats. In the Senate, assuming some conservatives try to filibuster this legislation, they would need 12 Republicans.

Leadership isn't reflexively opposed to the idea of taking a vote on dreamer legislation. House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) seems amenable to bringing it up. So does a powerful conservative voice, Sen. Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah), and a vulnerable 2018 Senate Republican, Jeff Flake (Ariz.). Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) hasn't commented on this yet.

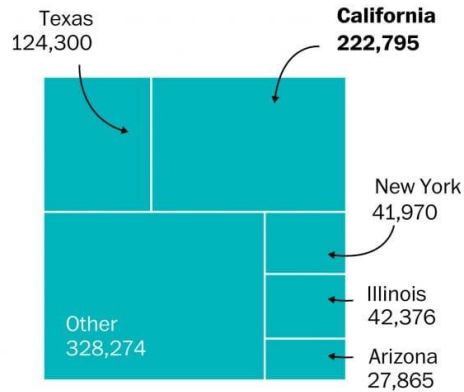
*[Paul Ryan and the conservative case for Trump to keep DACA]*

Also, dreamers are a sympathetic demographic. They came here under the age of 16, through no fault of their own. Many of them are as Americanized as someone who was born here. One died while rescuing people from Hurricane Harvey. If there's any group of undocumented immigrants that Republicans would proactively try to protect, this group would be it.

## Where do the dreamers live?

787,580 initial requests have been approved from 2012 to March 2017.

More of one-third had California as a residence.



Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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For that reason, many traditional Republicans realize that they ignore dreamers at their own political risk. Nowrasteh warned, “You don't get to come back from this and pretend to be the pro-immigration party anymore.”

The six-month countdown Trump is putting on dreamers' fate may even work in their favor, said Molly Reynolds, a congressional analyst with Brookings Institution. “It often takes a deadline, especially one with serious consequences for inaction, to force Congress’s hand and act.”

Maybe Congress could come up with a deal that could satisfy the two Republican parties, said Jessica Vaughan, the director of policy studies for the conservative Center for Immigration Studies. Like, give amnesty for DACA recipients in exchange for cutting legal immigration and stricter border enforcement.

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“I do think Congress can do this if they try,” she said in an email to The Fix. “There are already several bills they could draw on to put together a compromise that would accomplish all of these objectives, and they have a mandate from voters, who clearly back the Trump approach to immigration policy.”

But Nowrasteh cautions that trying to put together deals complicates dreamers' fates. Would Trump and his supporters demand that money for his border wall be part of the package? The wall has become such a symbol of the president himself that Democrats have already promised to block any bill with a dime for it.

“It's got to be a straight up-or-down vote: 'Do you want dreamers here?' That would pass,” he predicted.

But even that vote is unlikely to happen.