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The 4 bills Congress is seriously considering to protect ‘dreamers’

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Mark us down as skeptical that Congress will act to give “dreamers” some kind of legalized status. President Trump's ask that lawmakers fix the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program within six months comes to the doorstep of an extraordinarily dysfunctional Congress that is battling itself just to keep the government open and avoid an economically disastrous credit default.

Plus, this Congress is controlled by Republicans, many of whom oppose giving legal status to immigrants who got here illegally — at least, not without something in exchange to prevent more undocumented immigrants from coming to the United States.

Crucially, Republican leaders haven't ruled out the idea of voting on a bill to protect legalizing the estimated 800,000 young adults brought to the United States illegally as children after Trump rescinded their deportation protections.

If Congress does decide to act to protect dreamers, here are four of the likeliest legislative fixes.

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) spoke in favor of passing the Dream Act and protecting undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as minors on Sept. 5, after President Trump decided to end DACA. (Reuters)

What it does: Allows anyone who arrived younger than age 18, and has been in the United States for at least four years, to get conditional permanent residency. From there, if they have a job/stay in school/don't commit crimes, they can apply for a green card.

Introduced by: Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.), and supported by the No. 1 and No. 2 Senate Democrats, Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (N.Y.) and Richard J. Durbin (Ill.). Its nine co-sponsors in the Senate include two Republicans: Jeff Flake (Ariz.), who is up for reelection in 2018, and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska).

There's a companion bill in the House introduced by Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.). It has three co-sponsors, including two Republicans: Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Fla.) and Rep. Mike Coffman (Colo.).

Handicap: This is the most bipartisan bill of the group, and it's also the most expansive. It also has two conservative senators, Flake and Graham, championing it, which can go a long way to getting other conservatives on board. But it's not the one with the most Republican support.

That would be our next bill.

2. The Recognizing America's Children Act

What it does: Pretty much everything the Dream Act does, but for a narrower scope of people. Anyone who has come here before the age of 16 (as opposed to 18) and been in the United States for five years (as opposed to four) can apply for legalized status.

Introduced by: Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-Fla.), who represents Democratic-leaning Miami area. The bill is co-sponsored entirely by Republicans, 20 in all, including Trump supporters like Rep. Chris Collins (N.Y.).

There's no companion bill in the Senate yet, but Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy expert with the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, said some Senate Republicans are considering introducing a version. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) announced Tuesday he plans to introduce a bill that could legalize dreamers, which could be similar to this one in the House.

Handicap: Either this or the Dream bill have the best chances to pass, Nowrasteh said, mainly because Republicans are aware of them, and some key Republican lawmakers have signaled their support. This bill in particular could be pitched to conservatives as a more rigorous process than the executive order Trump just canceled, because it limits who can apply.

3. The Bridge Act

What it does: Protects dreamers for three years while giving Congress more time to figure out what it wants to do with them.

Introduced by: Coffman, the GOP congressman from a Democratic-leaning district in Colorado, who has also signed onto some of the other options above.

Handicap: The other bills that give dreamers more permanent protections are getting more attention. But Coffman told Denver's ABC News channel on Monday that he plans to file a petition that, if it gets enough signatures from his fellow lawmakers, would force the House to vote on this legislation.

4. The Enlist Act

What it does: Allows dreamers to earn legal status by serving in the military.

Introduced by: Rep. Jeff Denham (R-Calif.). It has more than 200 co-sponsors, spread out evenly from both parties, easily the most popular bill on this list.

Handicap: Well, during the campaign, Trump expressed minimal support for it, and has not mentioned it since. "I could see myself working that out, absolutely," he said at an NBC "Commander in Chief Forum."

But Denham himself said this bill is not the best way to protect all dreamers (since many may not want to, or be qualified to, serve in the military). "It's not the solution. It's a part of the solution," he told NPR on Tuesday.

Congress is so busy, and Republican leaders are battling so many internal factions right now, that there are a very limited number of shots Congress will get at protecting dreamers before Trump's six-month countdown clock runs out.