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## 3 reasons a deal to protect ‘dreamers’ might not happen

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Even though he ended their protections from deportations, President Trump now says he wants Congress to pass a bill protecting “dreamers” from deportation. So does House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.). And virtually every Democrat in Congress.

And yet, in a typical Washington fashion, nobody can seem to agree on how to do something everyone wants. Trump is meeting with a dozen or so lawmakers from both parties on Tuesday to talk about the fate of the dreamers, undocumented immigrants brought into the country as children, but people familiar with negotiations say there still isn't a deal.

Which means it's a very real possibility some 700,000 dreamers in the United States could lose their protections and start to be deported this spring.

Here are three main sticking points that people familiar with negotiations and immigration experts say is holding up a deal on dreamers — and one reason it might still happen.

**1. Trump's wall:** A person familiar with congressional negotiations, who was granted anonymity to speak candidly about the process, says things were moving along until late Friday. That's when Trump requested \$18 billion from Congress to start building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

An actual wall along most of the nearly 2,000 miles of border is a nonstarter for congressional Democrats, and a number of Republicans, too. As I wrote in September:

There's something for almost everyone in Washington to hate about the president's wall.

For Democrats, the wall is a manifestation of everything they despise about Trump — his hard-line immigration stances, simplistic policy ideas, identity-focused politics. In his very first speech of this whole ordeal he suggested Mexican immigrants are “rapists” and criminals. Yeah, that wall can't happen, Democrats say.

Mainstream Republicans don't like the wall, either. Nearly every border Republican is opposed. They argue that money could be better spent on more technologically advanced border security tools.

**2. Republicans who want to curb legal immigration:** There are a number of Republican lawmakers who are interested in extracting concessions from Democrats on *legal* immigration in exchange for protecting immigrants who are in the country illegally.

Sens. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) and David Perdue (R-Ga.) introduced a bill in August that would slash legal immigration by getting rid of visa lotteries and limiting the practice of allowing people to get visas because they have family in the United States. In its place, they would introduce a new merit-based immigration system that favors people's English-language ability, education level and job skills.

The bill is going nowhere in the Senate, where Democrats can block it with a filibuster. So its architects are trying to insert key pieces into a dreamer package.

Senate Democrats have voted for some of their requests in the past, as part of a 2013 immigration bill. But that was in exchange for giving millions of illegal immigrants a path to citizenship. Drastically curbing legal immigration is too much for Republicans to ask for in exchange for protecting some 700,000 immigrants, Democrats say.

“We’d be glad to do comprehensive immigration reform, like the Senate bill from 2013, that has more of what both sides want, but that will take time,” Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) told The Washington Post in a recent statement.

**3. A number of Republicans are okay with no deal on dreamers:** Even though polls show protecting dreamers is wildly popular, with about 80 percent of Americans wanting them to stay, that's not true among the conservative base of the Republican Party.

Which means conservative House Republicans have no incentive to negotiate a deal. If they get one, great; they can go home and tell their constituents how they also beefed up border security or limited legal immigration, said Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst with the libertarian Cato Institute. But they don't *have* to have one.

For some lawmakers, protecting dreamers is a liability. “Some members of our conference are talking about bailing out insurance companies, imposing gun control and granting amnesty,” Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), a founding member of the conservative Freedom Caucus, told The Fix in October as part of a separate conversation. “That's not what Donald Trump and Republicans campaigned on.”

Trump, despite his recent talk about how important bipartisanship is, doesn't seem that interested in a deal, either. He's the one who ended dreamers' protections and tossed the issue to Congress. And Nowrasteh notes that he's spending his time talking with conservative Republicans like Perdue and Cotton rather than Democrats, suggesting he's more open to the hard-liners than liberals.

**One reason a dreamer deal could happen:** Democrats are just more unified on what they want.

Trump wants a wall. Republican congressional leaders want to protect dreamers. Conservative Republicans want to limit legal immigration. Republicans, Nowrasteh said, “are all over the place.” Democrats want one thing right now: to extend dreamer protections.

If there's strength in being able to walk away from a deal, there's also strength in numbers to assert it.

If Democrats can hold a unified front on what they want while Republicans argue with each other on what they should ask for in exchange, Democrats might just be able to get a deal on dreamers through an extremely divided Congress.

Steve Bell, a GOP budget expert with the Bipartisan Policy Center, framed Democrats' position of strength this way: "If they can keep the subject on dreamers and give Trump some of his border money, I think they've got a chance."