



Editorial: Find the ‘heart,’ President Trump, to protect Dreamers

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We will soon find out how much “heart” President Donald Trump has.

After promising during his campaign to deport all undocumented immigrants, Trump said in February he would deal with a program that protects younger undocumented immigrants from deportation with “heart.”

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, known as DACA, was launched by former President Barack Obama in 2012. Since then, nearly 800,000 undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children, and often referred to as Dreamers, have passed background checks and received approval to live and work in the U.S. More than 42,000 who have signed up live in Illinois.

Conservatives are trying to force a weakened president to get rid of the program. Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton leads a coalition of 10 states threatening to sue the Trump administration if the DACA program is not rescinded by Sept. 5.

Trump should not cave, but we’re not confident he has it in him to take a stand here. Under his appointed attorney general, Jeff Sessions, the Justice Department would have to defend the DACA program in court if the states sue. Sessions seems more likely to try to persuade Trump to back down.

Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly told the Congressional Hispanic Caucus on Wednesday if the administration is sued, “he believes that ultimately DACA will not hold up in court,” Rep. Joaquin Castro of Texas told reporters.

Texas and 25 other states won a challenge to an executive action by Obama in 2016 that would have given temporary relief from deportation to parents of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents. That case ended up in the U.S. Supreme Court, where a short-handed court tied 4-4, and an appellate ruling in favor of the states stayed in place.

Kelly has said Congress could provide a remedy by enacting immigration legislation. We’d love to see the president build a coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats willing to pass immigration reform. That is likely beyond him.

At this point, the right thing is for Trump to try to get the state attorneys general to back down or fight them in court. Besides Texas, the states threatening to sue are Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.

In addition to compassionate reasons to let the program continue — younger adults and teenagers brought here had no say in the matter and know only the U.S. as home — Trump ought to consider the contributions made by immigrants who have DACA status.

Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine is an example of why the program works. This fall the school will have 32 immigrants with work authorization through DACA among some 660 students.

“They are the best of the best,” Mark Kuczewski, chair of the school’s Medical Education Department, told us. “If they couldn’t use their talents, it’s another form of injustice.”

Some in the Stritch program secured loans by agreeing to work in underserved communities in Illinois. Others plan to regardless of loan requirements, Kuczewski told us.

If DACA is eliminated, students nearing graduation would not be able to go on to residency programs next year, Kuczewski said, because their ability to work legally would be gone. Those still enrolled in medical school would lose their loans and ability to pay for school.

“It would be incredibly brutal,” Kuczewski said.

The losses would be twofold: The students would lose careers; Illinois residents in poorer communities who could have had access to the doctors would be shortchanged yet again.

Here’s another reason DACA should continue in the absence of immigration reform by Congress: Dreamers’ ability to work legally results in higher wages and larger contributions in taxes. The Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, estimates that repealing the program would result in a \$280 billion reduction in economic growth over the next decade.

“A repeal or rollback of DACA would harm the economy and cost the U.S. government a significant amount of lost tax revenue,” the institute said in a report earlier this year.

Trump needs to get the attorneys general — and the nationalists who are urging them to squash DACA — to see that getting rid of the program is bad for America.