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End of DACA is an opportunity for real immigration reform

By eliminating DACA Trump is giving Congress a historic opportunity for immigration reform. This is a chance for lawmakers to enact more profound immigration reform that is fair, enforceable and lives up to the nation's ideals.



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President Donald Trump speaks as

After months of speculation and rumor that has frightened immigrant communities across the United States, President Donald J. Trump has announced the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program.

President Barack Obama created the program known as DACA in 2012 to help protect undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children from

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), looks on during a meeting with congressional leaders in the Roosevelt Room of the White House, in Washington, Sept. 5, 2017. (New York Times News Service)

deportation. Since 2012 DACA has provided relief, and work authorization, to nearly 800,000 undocumented minors.

I laud the Obama administration for the courage and ingenuity to create DACA. Trump should not have ended the program that has benefited so many

immigrants.

But there may be a silver lining in Trump's dismantling of DACA: He is delaying the end of the program for six months. This gives Congress time to pass a law that would provide enduring protections for the DREAMers, the term used to refer to undocumented college students who have become a potent political force. And it even could spur more far-reaching immigration reform.

The end of DACA has been met with expressions of nothing less than grief and a firestorm of bipartisan criticism. House Speaker Paul Ryan and Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah, for example, lobbied the president not to end the program. DACA seemed to have more supporters than ever. In the coming weeks, the nation is likely to see a great many protests and calls for political action.

It is worth remembering that Obama created DACA after Congress failed for years to enact comprehensive immigration reform. As he emphasized at the time, the deferred action program was a limited, and temporary, response to congressional gridlock on immigration. In my estimation, the creation of DACA was a constitutional and eminently sensible approach to a most sympathetic cohort of immigrants.

California has more DACA recipients than any other state — thousands of college students use the program that allows them to obtain authorization to work their way through school. In short, DACA students are seeking a better life than their parents.

In light of the fact that virtually all agree that the current immigration system is broken, Democratic and Republican political leaders should welcome the opportunity to reconsider immigration reform. Critics of DACA say it was flawed from the beginning because Obama created it through executive order. They instead argue that Congress is the appropriate branch of government to provide relief to undocumented immigrants. Whether one buys that argument or not, Congress now must act to protect DACA recipients and, in so doing, can once again tackle immigration reform.

In the end, DACA is just one piece of the larger immigration debate. The reform of our immigration laws is, needless to say, a complex problem. In 2013 a bipartisan group of senators passed carefully-crafted legislation aimed at reforming the legal immigration system, bolstering enforcement, and providing legal status to the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. But the Republican-controlled House of Representatives never put the legislation to a vote.

The immigration reform proposal on the table today unfortunately would not solve any of these problems, but rather make them worse. During the summer, Trump expressed support for a proposal called the Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment (RAISE) Act, co-sponsored by Republican Senators Tom Cotton of Arkansas and David Purdue of Georgia. The Act would drastically reshape American immigration and likely increase pressures on undocumented immigration.

The RAISE Act would reduce legal immigration by 50 percent over the next decade. The government annually grants lawful permanent residence to approximately 1 million immigrants from countries including Mexico, China and India. About two-thirds of visas in the United States are allocated because applicants have family members already in the country. But this bill would eliminate all family sponsorship beyond spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents.

Besides dramatically reducing family-based immigration, the RAISE Act would replace the current selection scheme with a points system based on “merit.” Applicants would earn points that favor high-paying job offers, advanced degrees and huge financial investments of more than \$1 million in the United States. People who are closest to age 25 and have high English proficiency scores would also receive preference. The act would do nothing to help ensure the the lawful admission of workers in agriculture and the service industries, which today employs many undocumented workers.

The changes proposed under the RAISE Act would only exacerbate the current problem of undocumented immigration. The United States has roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants largely because of the unrealistic restrictions on legal immigration under current laws. California is home to nearly a quarter of the nation’s undocumented immigrants.

If Congress enacts a system like the RAISE Act, it will not address the high demand in the United States for low- and medium-skilled workers. Who will fill the jobs in agriculture, construction and service industries that undocumented immigrants overwhelmingly perform today?

By eliminating DACA Trump is giving Congress a historic opportunity for immigration reform. This is a chance for lawmakers to enact more profound immigration reform that is fair, enforceable and lives up to the nation’s ideals. Such reform is just what the nation needs in these troubled times.

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