

COMMENTARY

IMMIGRATION

Ending This Immigration Program Would Devastate the Economy

Julissa Arce

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Senators Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced a new Dream Act in Congress Wednesday, reminding Americans that there is strong bipartisan support for Dreamers—immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children and are seeking citizenship. According to a recent [Morning Consult and Politico poll](#), 78% of American voters support giving Dreamers the chance to stay permanently in America, including 73% of people who voted for President Donald Trump.

The Dream Act is a strong legislative solution that would allow young immigrants to continue living their American dream with a path to permanent residency and eventually citizenship. But until a long-term solution such as the Dream Act or comprehensive immigration reform is enacted, we need to continue protecting the nearly 800,000 immigrant youth currently living with Deferred Actions for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). In doing so, they would not only protect these people's futures, but also the very economic health of our country.

Young immigrants today are scared and confused. The president has demonized us as “rapists” and “criminals,” then celebrated us as “incredible kids” who will be “treated with heart.”

The DACA program, which allows certain undocumented youth to work legally in the U.S., and provides protection from deportation, has made these immigrants feel safer in a country they consider their home. But politicians have put their livelihoods in jeopardy by making political and legal moves to rescind the program—and Trump's flip-flopping has given them the political cover to do so. My home state of Texas has taken the lead in this particular race to the bottom, with [Attorney General Ken Paxton calling on other states to join him in demanding that the administration end the program](#)—he has nine with him so far.

These young people arrived in the U.S. with stories similar to mine. They came here as children with their families and have lived here most of their lives. We all grew up watching

the same TV shows, playing the same games, studying American history, and eating hot dogs and ice cream. We have the same dreams as so many Americans: going to college, getting a job we love, and spending time with our families and friends.

So how are we different? For most of our lives we've had to live in the shadows. This has kept many of us from going to college and getting good jobs, living with dreams and aspirations that could not be realized. But DACA changed this for thousands of Dreamers. The program has given immigrant youth the chance to come out of hiding and to live their full potential, contributing to their communities and their country. With DACA, young people can work, get a driver's license and go to college; they can live free from the constant anxiety and fear of being ripped from the only real home they know.

I never had DACA, but I know many bright young people who do. In fact, my organization, the Ascend Educational Fund, provides scholarships for young immigrants, many of whom have DACA and rely on it to be eligible for college admission. One of our scholars is a young man named Israel who emigrated from Mexico and graduated from one of the top high schools in the nation. He is a CUNY Excellence Award winner and attends Baruch College in New York. He has also been a loyal volunteer with the Big Brother Big Sisters of America program in his community, working to beat back the stereotypes and hateful rhetoric around the immigrant community.

Maintaining DACA is not only right for young immigrants like Israel, it is also smart. The economic benefits of DACA are clear. With DACA in effect, recipients are getting higher levels of education and using their skills and training to get better jobs. This means higher wages and more tax revenue. According to a [2016 Center for American Progress study](#), recipients are also buying cars and houses and starting new businesses, all of which means more tax revenue to cities and states across the country.

Should the program be terminated, however, the losses would be devastating. The same study estimates that ending DACA would reduce the nation's GDP by \$433.4 billion over a decade. [Another study by the Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#) states that 685,195 young immigrants would become unemployed immediately, causing employers to incur \$3.4 billion in costs associated with the termination and replacement of employees. Without DACA, tax revenue would be seriously impacted. Over the next decade, \$24.6 billion in Social Security and Medicare contributions would be lost.

Ending DACA and targeting immigrant youth for deportation will come with serious political consequences. Politicians on both sides of the aisle would be wise to focus on issues that strengthen our economy and not undermine it. The program contributes significantly to the American economy and grants young people the chance to thrive and succeed. To throw DACA away is both bad policy and a broken promise to our youth. President Trump: We're counting on you to treat our incredible kids with heart and ensure that DACA is here to stay.

Julissa Arce is the author of My (Underground) American Dream. Arce made national and international headlines when she revealed that she had achieved the American dream of wealth and status working her way up to vice president at [Goldman Sachs](#) by age 27 while being an undocumented immigrant from Mexico. Follow her on Twitter [@julissaarce](#).