News
Editorial

by NCR Editorial Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

January 19, 2018
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

For more Editorial cartoons, click here.

The Trump administration is moving closer to ordering mass deportations of two migrant communities who need and deserve our protection.

Some 800,000 young people are in danger of deportation because the Trump administration declined to renew the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program. The administration is also ending temporary protected status for a number of countries.

The DACA program comprises young people between the ages of 16 and 35 who were brought to this country without documentation by their parents when they were minors. They were safe from deportation under DACA, which has wide bipartisan support. President Donald Trump has given Congress until March to renew the protections legislatively before ending them.

Since then, DACA recipients, sometimes called Dreamers, have become a political bargaining chip. Trump and other Republicans used promises of rescuing DACA to pass December's tax plan and two stop-gap spending measures. Trump has flip-flopped between supporting DACA and wanting to end it. As a candidate he

campaigned against it, but as president he said he'd treat the Dreamers "with heart."

In September, he allowed the program to lapse. As recently as Jan. 9, he said Congress should send for his signature a "bill of love" preserving the program, but then he doubled down on demands that the DACA bill include $18 billion to build physical barriers on the United States' southern border, as well as end family-based migration and scrap the visa-lottery program. By Jan. 11, he seemed fed up with negotiations and lashed out at a group of senators meeting at the White House about the legislation.

With enough pressure from Congress, the negotiations can be revived, but Congresspeople won't act without feeling the pressure themselves from constituents.

DACA recipients have grown up in this country, are shaped and formed by our institutions. The program requires them to have either completed or be in high school. Many are enrolled in college. As many as 90 percent have jobs. Almost a thousand of them serve in the U.S. military. The program does not accept anyone convicted of a felony or with significant misdemeanors. This is a community we should welcome, not reject. Immigrant rights groups estimate 1.5 million more young people could qualify for DACA, but they have not come forward for fear of deportation.

> Of all the problems that beset our immigration system, the DACA program could well be the easiest to fix.
>
> Tweet this

This does not have to be a partisan issue. A majority of Republican voters believe the Dreamers deserve help and protection, and many Republican members of Congress agree. Of all the problems that beset our immigration system, the DACA program could well be the easiest to fix.

Another vulnerable group is the 325,000 immigrants who have temporary protected status. They come from 10 countries, but most are from El Salvador. Hondurans and Haitians are the next-largest national groups in the program. All of them have been granted legal residency because they cannot return to their countries because of

armed conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary conditions.

The Salvadorans lost protected status Jan. 9. Sudanese, Nicaraguans and Haitians lost protective status late last year. A half dozen other nationalities, including Hondurans and Yemenis, are under threat of losing this status. This, too, is tragic and should be stopped.

Read this next: Times require loud, bold defense of migrants

A study of Salvadorans, Hondurans and Haitians with temporary protected status that was done by the Center for Migration Studies, founded by the Scalabrini Fathers, concluded that this group of migrants is "a hard-working population with strong ties to the United States." A great many have lived in the U.S. for 15 or 20 years or more. Many arrived as children, and many have U.S. citizen children. More than 80 percent have jobs and pay federal, state and local taxes. Many hold mortgages and pay property taxes.

Besides contributing to the economic well-being of this country, they support extended families in their countries of origin. By one estimate, Salvadoran immigrants with temporary protected status send some $600 million a year to El Salvador, or about 2 percent of that nation's gross domestic product. The percentages of GDP are similar for Honduras and Haiti.

They have rebuilt shattered lives. They have put down roots, grown families and become integrated into American communities. All of that will be uprooted.

If they are forced to leave, Salvadorans and Hondurans especially will find themselves in danger of political and criminal violence. Haitians will be forced to return to a country that offers no chances of meaningful employment or adequate housing. Some 230,000 U.S. citizen children will either be torn from their families or have to go with them to the parents' dangerous home country.

Advertisement

We can fix this problem without mass deportations. NCR endorses recommendations proposed by the Center for Migration Studies, including:

- Extending temporary protected status for as long as adverse conditions persist in these countries;
- Allowing temporary protected status beneficiaries to transition to lawful permanent resident status;
- Permitting temporary protected status recipients who are eligible for a family-based visa or some other immigration benefit under current law to apply for these programs.

The Center for Migration Studies also notes that substantial humanitarian and economic investments in these nations by the United States would ease adverse conditions and allow the safe return of temporary protected status beneficiaries.

These beneficiaries are in this country legally now. Changing that benefits no one. Tearing apart families benefits no one. The temporary protected status program, like DACA, needs a long-term solution, but mass deportations are not the answer.

A version of this story appeared in the **Jan 26-Feb 8, 2018** print issue.