



To stimulate the economy, help America's dreamers

By Matt Sandgren | Tuesday, June 2, 2020

Since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak, [Manuel Bernal](#)—a resident physician assigned to one of Chicago's busiest hospitals—has been working day and night to deliver lifesaving care to patients suffering from COVID-19. Manuel is just one among thousands of health care workers who has put the safety of others before his own in the fight against the coronavirus. And he is just one among thousands who could soon be deported because of his immigration status.

Any day now, the Supreme Court will decide the fate of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program ([DACA](#)), and with it, the future of America's Dreamers. Dreamers are undocumented immigrants who, like Manuel Bernal, were brought to this country as children through no fault of their own. For the sake of our health care system and the recovering economy, it's critical that Congress act now to provide these individuals with permanent legal status.

As a senior counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2013, I helped negotiate the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744)—a bill that, among other things, directly addressed the plight of America's Dreamers. Of the hundreds of amendments that were proposed to the bill, none addressed the Dreamers. That's because there was already bipartisan consensus on the need to provide some sort of legal status for the more than [700,000](#) undocumented immigrants who grew up in America and were already contributing to our society in remarkable ways.

The case for America's Dreamers was strong back then; today, it's stronger than ever.

Consider the invaluable contributions of Dreamers to the nation's coronavirus response. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there are approximately [29,000](#) DACA recipients working in health care. These include not only physicians like Manuel Bernal but intensive-care nurses like [Ana Cueva](#), who is working 12-hour night shifts at a hospital in a California community hit hard by COVID-19, and medical assistants like [Francisco Matias](#), who is risking infection both to himself and his family by seeing up to 14 patients a day. These are men and women who are placing themselves in harm's way to conduct coronavirus tests, administer emergency relief to our grandparents, intubate critically ill patients, and ultimately save lives.

Are these really the individuals we would send away in this moment of crisis? To do so would likely hamstring our health care system at a crucial time. It would also do significant damage to our essential services workforce, which includes more than [170,000](#) Dreamers employed in education, technology, agriculture, transportation and other critical fields.

Dreamers are a tremendous boon to our economy. It's difficult to put their impact in words—so let's put it in numbers. According to the [American Action Forum](#), each year these individuals contribute a \$3.4 billion surplus to the federal budget and \$42 billion in GDP. That's an average GDP contribution of \$109,000 per worker per year.

Now consider what our country stands to lose if we allow DACA to expire with nothing to replace it. In the worst-case scenario, if Dreamers were to be deported, it would [cost our economy](#) between \$7 and \$21 billion and shrink GDP by 0.4 percent. Further, the economy would experience a [\\$280 billion](#) reduction in growth over the next decade. Our nation could ill afford a loss of this magnitude in normal times, much less in the midst of one of the greatest economic crises in a century.

To contain the coronavirus and restore the economy, Congress will need to use every policy tool at its disposal. It can start by finding a lasting solution for America's Dreamers. While the Obama administration's creation of DACA was legally dubious to begin with, Congress has done little in the meantime to address the Dreamer dilemma. It's time for the legislative branch to take leadership on this issue. A problem so complex can be solved only through congressional action—not by court edict or executive fiat.

That's why in the coming days, whether the Supreme Court upholds the Trump administration's order to end DACA won't actually change that much. Why? Because no matter how the court rules, our need remains the same: a long-term legislative fix for America's Dreamers. The president himself has [urged this course of action](#). A bill providing legal status for these hardworking men and women would be a stimulus package all on its own. It would allow us to retain much-needed talent in the health care sector and essential services workforce and would help sustain our economic recovery over the long term.

The need for Congress to act is greater today than ever before. The American people are counting on their elected representatives to do the right thing by finding a permanent solution for Dreamers.

Matt Sandgren is the executive director of the Orrin G. Hatch Foundation and a former senior counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee.