

Trump ends DACA program for young undocumented immigrants

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Supporters of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) demonstrate on Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House in Washington, D.C., September 3, 2017. Photo from AP

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Donald Trump will "wind down" a program protecting hundreds of thousands of young immigrants who were brought into the country illegally as children.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions called the Obama administration's program "unconstitutional." As head of the Justice Department, Sessions is in charge of the nation's courts and policing.

Obama Program Aided Young Immigrants

The government will stop processing new applications under President Barack Obama's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program. The program has provided nearly 800,000 young immigrants the ability to work legally in the U.S. and protection against deportation.

Trump's government is giving Congress six months to come up with a new law. After that, the government will stop giving out permits for people already covered by the program.

"Societies where the rule of law is treasured are societies that tend to flourish and succeed," Sessions said of the decision to end DACA.

Trump suggested in an earlier tweet that it would be up to lawmakers in Congress to ultimately decide the fate of those now protected by the program. He tweeted, "Congress, get ready to do your job - DACA!"

Trump Tweet: "American Citizens First!"

"Make no mistake, we are going to put the interest of AMERICAN CITIZENS FIRST!" Trump added in a second, retweeted message. "The forgotten men & women will no longer be forgotten."

Sessions' announcement came the same day as a deadline set by a group of Republican state officials. They said they would challenge DACA in court unless the Trump administration ended the program.

Many, like Sessions, believe that the program would not hold up in the Supreme Court, the highest court in the land. They believe it is unconstitutional, or against the laws laid out in the U.S. Constitution.

Republicans Have Struggled With Immigration Issue

Trump plans to take a harder line on young immigrants unless Congress steps in. This threatens to create even more division among Republicans who have long struggled with the issue. Republican lawmakers have a long history of being unable to act on immigration because they are not united on what changes to make.

Trump has spent months wrestling with what to do with DACA. While he was running for president, Trump slammed the program as illegal. His advisers have urged Trump to follow through on his campaign promise to end it.

Trump Spoke Favorably Of Program In The Past

Trump has repeatedly expressed sympathy for the young people protected by the program. He describes the decision as one of the most difficult he's had to grapple with as president.

"I think the Dreamers are terrific," Trump said last week. "Dreamers" is a term used to describe people covered under DACA.

All the while, Trump's administration has continued to issue new permits and continued coverage to immigrants who qualify.

Trump's approach is essentially kicking the can down the road and letting Congress deal with it. This plan is filled with uncertainty and political perils. One opponent said it amounts to "Republican suicide."

Still, other Republicans say they are ready to take the issue on. Republican Senator Lindsay Graham said they will work to find a legislative solution to the problem.

Program Was Created In 2012

DACA was created in 2012 while the Obama administration was pushing for a broader change to immigration laws in Congress. It was unsuccessful. Many Republicans say they opposed the program because it was more than the president should have the power to do.

House Speaker Paul Ryan and a handful of other Republicans urged Trump last week to hold off on scrapping DACA. They want to give lawmakers time to come up with a legislative fix first.

Congress has repeatedly tried and failed to come together on new immigration legislation. It remains uncertain whether the House would succeed in passing anything on the divisive topic.

Legislative Options On The Table

One bill addressing the issue was introduced by Republican Senator Graham and Democratic Senator Dick Durbin. Their plan would let more than 1 million young people who arrived in the United States before they turned 18 live legally and permanently in the U.S. First, they must pass security checks and do other things, like go to college, join the military or find a job.

It's unclear, however, whether the president would throw his support behind that or any other laws. He could encourage the writing of a new bill tied to funding for his promised border wall or other concessions like lowering legal immigration.

It's unclear how much the president would be willing to risk. His supporters are strongly opposed to illegal immigration. He also blasted DACA as illegal during his presidential campaign, and he has been reluctant to push hard on other issues, like health care.

Trump's expected move has sparked protests, letter-writing campaigns and other efforts urging him not to act.

Obama Defends Program

Obama has been mostly quiet since Trump took office. On Tuesday, though, the former president spoke out against the Trump administration's decision to end DACA.

"Let's be clear: the action taken today isn't required legally," Obama wrote in a Facebook post. "It's a political decision, and a moral question. Whatever concerns or complaints Americans may have about immigration in general, we shouldn't threaten the future of this group of young people who are here through no fault of their own, who pose no threat, who are not taking away anything from the rest of us."