



To: Interested Parties
From: Jennifer Palmieri, President, and Navin Nayak, Executive Director, Center for American Progress Action Fund
Re: Defending Dreamers is a Moral Imperative and a Defining Political Moment for Democrats
Date: January 8, 2018

In September, President Donald Trump set in motion a process that will strip protections from nearly 800,000 Dreamers, young people who came to the United States more than a decade ago and who are American by every measure except a piece of paper. Ending Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) will lead to the deportation of Dreamers, separating them from their homes, their communities, and their loved ones—hundreds of thousands of whom are U.S. citizens. Ending DACA will drive these young people—[91 percent](#) of whom are in the workforce—out of their jobs, upending their ability to live a life with dignity, to provide for their family members, and to build a future that benefits all of us. Ending DACA will prevent many of these young people from pursuing higher education, choking off their tremendous human potential and squandering talent that this country has invested in through years of primary and secondary school education.

These harms to Dreamers are not off in the distant future. They will not just hover on the horizon until March. They are happening today and they have been happening every day for the last four months. [Nearly 15,000 DACA recipients](#) already have lost protection from deportation; each time Congress forgoes an opportunity to pass legislation—as it did on September 8, December 8, and December 21—more lives are thrown into disarray and ruined. Now is the time for Democrats to stand on principle and to fight hard.

The fight to protect Dreamers is not only a moral imperative, it is also a critical component of the Democratic Party's future electoral success. Donald Trump and the Republican Party continue to jeopardize the futures of millions of Dreamers and their families and throw up roadblocks to meaningful legislative reform, and it is up to Democrats to stand up for them.

As with all of the chaos in 2017, Donald Trump created this problem. It was entirely within his power to leave DACA intact. If a legal challenge to the program had been brought he could have allowed it to be addressed by the courts. The current crisis could have been averted. Instead, Trump seized an opportunity to play to the racists in his base by proactively and abruptly ending the program. Now, Trump and Republicans are refusing to restore protections for Dreamers unless Democrats meet a series of absurd

demands, including building Trump's infamous and unnecessary border wall and drastically slashing long-standing avenues for legal immigration. Throughout 2017, Trump repeatedly cheered the notion of shutting down the government if his demands aren't met, going so far as to [promise in August](#), "If we have to close down our government, we're building that wall." Trump similarly [beat the drum in 2013](#) when Republicans last shut down the government.

Democrats have made it abundantly clear that they oppose President Trump's rash decision to end DACA protections for Dreamers. But saying you support Dreamers just isn't enough—not when DACA recipients are losing protection every day and hundreds of thousands of Dreamers live in perpetual fear of what the future holds. This time, Democrats need to stand with Dreamers and do whatever it takes to ensure they remain in this country—often the only one they've ever known. Democrats should refuse to offer any votes for Republican spending bills that do not offer a fix for Dreamers and instead appropriate funds to deport them.

Political allegiances are made in moments like these. Voters want to know that politicians and leaders are with them and ultimately one of them. Once that becomes clear, voters will also stand with those leaders. That is the key lesson to draw from the political realignment that took place in California in the years following the enactment of Proposition 187. Although support for Republicans among California Latinos had been on the rise in the years preceding that ballot initiative, the anger and alienation felt by Latino residents—and by some white Republican voters, as well—led to a rapid seismic shift in the political landscape of the state. But that happened not only because a large share of the electorate turned away from the Republican Party, but also because they were welcomed by the Democratic Party. Instead of apathy these voters took action. That action and the subsequent shift in the political landscape might not have been possible had Democrats not joined the fight and stood with the community on principle.

Despite Donald Trump's fantastical assertions, Latino support for Republicans will only continue to wane. The Republican Party, particularly with Trump as its leader, has been plainspoken about its disdain for immigrants and is more interested in bashing immigrants to cater to its base than it is in acknowledging that immigrants are an important part of America's social fabric. As a result, Republicans have, in all likelihood, lost the overwhelming majority of Latino voters for at least a generation.

For Democrats, the risk is that Latinos fail to see them as a true ally, and as a result sit out crucial elections. A September poll by Latino Decisions found that [91 percent of Latinos](#) want Congress to pass a Dream Act with a path to earned citizenship. But public support for Dreamers extends far beyond Latinos. For some context, a fall *Washington Post*-ABC poll found [86 percent](#) of Americans support protecting Dreamers. Similarly, a *Politico*/Morning Consult poll found that only [15 percent of Americans](#) believe that Dreamers should be deported—the ultimate result of Trump's decision and continued congressional inaction.

Dreamers may not be equally represented in every state, but Latinos are a critical part of the progressive coalition and progressive leaders have to step up and fight for them. If Democrats can't even stand up to Trump and Republicans in defense of Dreamers—whose moral case is unassailable—they will leave a lot of progressives wondering who Democrats will fight for. At that point, Latinos may not be the only constituency within the Democratic base that becomes dispirited and disengaged. If Democrats don't try to do everything in their power to defend Dreamers, that will jeopardize Democrats' electoral chances in 2018 and beyond. In short, the next few weeks will tell us a lot about the Democratic Party and its long-term electoral prospects.