



COMMUNIQUE

DACA THE RIGHT TO DREAM

PART 1 IN A SERIES

By Edward Yood

Every great dream begins with a dreamer, unless you are one of the 800,000 children living in the United States who might now be forced to leave.

For 800,000 young people who grew up on America soil, the dream of a better life might be just that — a dream. They were brought to this country illegally as children by parents fleeing other countries who wanted more for themselves and their families. They have been raised as American as Americans themselves. The question is whether they will be allowed to continue living the dream of an American life, or they and their families will be deported.

These children, and possibly hundreds of thousands more, are referred to as Dreamers under a program called the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, created by former President Obama through a 2012 executive order that has allowed them to remain in the country.

But enrollment in the DACA program is not automatic; immigrants must apply. Those who did were at least temporarily shielded from deportation. They also got temporary Social Security numbers and two-year work permits. To qualify, they had to have arrived in the U.S. before 2007 (at 16 years old, or younger), been 30 or younger in 2012, and either have a high-school degree or be enrolled in school or a similar educational program. DACA recipients can live and work legally in the U.S. for renewable two-year periods.

Immigration rights advocates have said up to 200,000 more have sought DACA protection since Donald Trump became president. Some experts have said the program could end up covering 1.3 million young people if allowed to continue. Requests for renewals are reportedly being filed at the rate of about 8,000 a week.

DACA was a compromise created by the Obama administration after Congress failed to pass the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. DREAM would have offered those who came to the U.S. illegally as children the opportunity to potentially gain permanent legal residency. The act was first introduced in August 2001 and has resurfaced several times, always failing to get through Congress.

But all that might change thanks to Commander in Chief #45, whose intention is to “wind down” the government program. It is an initiative being intensely debated across the country.

Communications Workers of America (CWA) denounced Trump’s decision as cruel and mean-spirited. “These young people were brought here by their parents at a very young age. They know no other home than the United States, and have made productive, successful lives here, contributing to their communities and looking to be full participants in our nation. The United States is their home country,” CWA wrote in a statement.

Dreamers have attended American schools and learned the language and way of life. Many contribute toward their families, their communities, and the U.S. economy. Repealing DACA would have negative consequences for the schools, hospitals, tech firms, courts, and community organizations at which a large number of Dreamers now, or will, work.

Democrats and Republicans, including the Republican leadership, have urged the President not to eliminate DACA. It’s now up to Congress to focus on passing adequate and appropriate legislation. While DACA is not a perfect policy, it has provided a significant boost to a large number of young people. “Ending this program would hurt the lives of thousands of people in a cruel fashion and serves no purpose,” said Gloria Middleton, Local 1180 Secretary-Treasurer. “CWA strongly believes that any changes to the program should not have a negative impact on children or their families. The Trump administration has failed a moral test in trying to end DACA.”

When Obama announced his intention to expand DACA to cover additional immigrants, multiple states immediately sued to prevent the expansion, which was ultimately blocked by the courts. Fast forward to the Trump Administration that on September 5, 2017, rescinded the program. However, full implementation of the rescission was delayed six months to give Congress time to decide how to deal with the population that was previously eligible under the policy.

Just one day later, on September 6, after a meeting with Trump at the White House, Democratic leaders Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi said they had come to terms with Trump on a plan that would provide protection for Dreamers in exchange for stronger border security. #45 then tweeted, as he’s prone to do: “No deal was made last night on DACA. Massive border security would have to be agreed to in exchange for consent. Would be subject to vote.”

Even Dreamers themselves seem to sometimes be on opposite sides of the fence, which is what makes DACA itself a complicated issue. A

group representing young undocumented immigrants interrupted an event hosted by House Minority Leader Pelosi to accuse her and other Democrats of selling out immigrants by negotiating with President Donald Trump.

"We are not your bargaining chip," they yelled at the event. Some of the protesters said they were concerned that they will be granted new protections in a deal that harms other undocumented immigrants, potentially including their parents.

Many progressive organizations, labor unions, faith-based groups, and elected officials have expressed solidarity with the young people whose DACA status is on the line. In addition to CWA, members and officials of the United Auto Workers, SEIU, UNITE HERE!, RWDSU and other labor unions have all denounced DACA's termination.

So what's next for the Dreamers? That lies in the hands of Congress and #45. This series will be continued in the next Communique.