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## POLITICS

# Donald Trump Faces Pressure on How to Handle Young Immigrants

Democrats and some Republicans push to keep protections for those who came to U.S. as children



A group of immigrants held a protest march for immigration reform in New York City in October. *PHOTO: ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES*

By **LAURA MECKLER** and **KRISTINA PETERSON**

Dec. 6, 2016 1:28 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President-elect Donald Trump’s first big test on immigration will be how to handle the “Dreamers”—young people brought to the U.S. illegally as children whom President Barack Obama protected from deportation. Mr. Trump is already under pressure from both sides.

Administratively, rolling back those protections is among the easiest things Mr. Trump can do on immigration, but politically, it is among the hardest. How he handles the program—known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA—will be an early test of how faithfully Mr. Trump plans to adhere to his campaign promises, which include ending the protections.

On Capitol Hill, the president-elect already faces opposition from several Republicans over stripping young people of their protected status, as well as strong support, portending an early showdown within his party.

The 2012 Obama program has about 750,000 participants, who have been given work permits as well as safe harbor from deportation. During the campaign, Mr. Trump vowed to “immediately terminate” the program, calling it unconstitutional.

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That could mean revoking the permits immediately or allowing them to expire, as rules require them to be renewed every two years. Revoking the permits wouldn’t necessarily

mean participants would be deported, but they would no longer enjoy special protections or be able to legally work.

Immigration opponents are pressing the Trump transition team to keep his immigration promises.

“We would regard it as a knife in the back to the people who voted for Trump if they did anything other than cancel DACA” on the first day or first week of the new administration, said Roy Beck, executive director of Numbers USA, which favors restrictions on legal and illegal immigration.

But the prospect of dismantling Mr. Obama’s executive action is prompting a wave of protests on college campuses and anger from immigration advocates. It is also generating anxiety for people enrolled in the program, who are worried they have given their contact information to the government, which could use it to find and deport them. More than 500 university presidents have signed a letter calling for the program to be upheld, calling it a “moral imperative and a national necessity.”

Dismantling DACA also would spark a backlash in Congress, where Democrats and some Republicans have long argued for giving some protections to the younger immigrants brought to the U.S. as children by their parents. Mr. Obama, too, has lobbied the president-elect to keep the program in place.

“I’m not comfortable with deporting families and breaking up families,” said Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R., W.Va.). She said she wants to study the issue further.



Rosario Reyes, originally from El Salvador, and her son prepared for an event about immigration in front of the Supreme Court last year. PHOTO: TOM WILLIAMS/CQ ROLL CALL/GETTY IMAGES

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) said that while the constitutionality of Mr. Obama’s executive action was questionable, it would be a mistake for Mr. Trump to overturn it

with no protections in place for those who came forward under it.

“If he repeals it, then we ought to immediately pass legislation to extend their legal status,” said Mr. Graham, who said he was working with Republicans, including Sen. Jeff Flake (R., Ariz.), and Democrats on the issue. “The worst outcome is to repeal the legal status that these kids have. Whether you agree with them having it or not, they’ve got it.”

Mr. Flake said he wouldn’t give Mr. Trump advice on how to handle the program but hoped that legislation ultimately would give these young people a permanent legal status.

“These were kids who were brought across the border when they were young, in most cases. That’s a pretty sympathetic group,” he said.

In 2010, the Dream Act, which would have opened a path to citizenship for these young people, passed the House, which was controlled at the time by Democrats. But it failed to win the supermajority needed in the Senate, also controlled by Democrats.

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Following that defeat, the Dreamers built a political operation to pressure

Congress and the White House. Their tactics included street protests and “coming out” events, where young people living in the U.S. illegally told their stories. Tales of high-school valedictorians and other achievers who couldn’t work or in some cases attend college won attention and clout for the group.

Their activism helped push Mr. Obama to create the DACA program in 2012, though he had previously maintained that he didn’t have authority to do so. He was rewarded with strong Hispanic support for his re-election later that year. Then, in his second term, after he tried and failed to pass a broad immigration overhaul, the Dreamers were among the most aggressive in pressuring Mr. Obama to issue a more sweeping executive action.

Again, Mr. Obama ultimately complied. In 2014, he offered similar protections to millions of parents of U.S. citizens and permanent residents, and expanded the DACA program to more people. That action was halted by the courts.

In Congress, Democrats have long favored broad immigration legislation, including a path to citizenship for most undocumented immigrants. But with Republicans about to control the White House and both chambers of Congress, lawmakers are again focused on the narrower Dream Act.

Sen. Dick Durbin (D., Ill.), an author of the original legislation, told reporters he was teaming up with Mr. Graham on the issue and that they hoped to produce a bill as soon as this week, though it is unlikely to make it to the Senate floor this year.

For now, Mr. Durbin has been giving frequent speeches on the issue and lobbying Senate Republicans since the election to back legislation that would allow these young immigrants to keep their work visas.

Even some anti-immigration activists say they could accept protecting Dreamers if it was done in legislation and in exchange for enacting tougher immigration-enforcement measures. Dan Stein, president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said the young people are “a great leverage point” to move a vigorous enforcement bill.

“We understand the DACA people will be viewed by the public as having the strongest equities of the population here illegally,” he said. “But those decisions have to be made by the Congress.”

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