

Blog

MUST READ: What President Obama Did for 'Dreamers' in 2012, He Should Do Again

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Two years ago today, DREAMers across America lined up for blocks to begin applying for deferred action (DACA), the program which today gives half million young immigrants protection from deportation, a work permit and the ability to pursue the American Dream, mobility via driver's licenses, and much more. Two years later, Republicans are obsessed with ending DACA, which would effectively mean the resumption of deportations for DREAMers. A must-read on today's anniversary is this piece at National Journal, by United We Dream's Greisa Martinez, which denounces Republicans for their unbelievably anti-immigrant shenanigans this Congress, and calls on President Obama to do more to protect immigrants. Read the full piece below, or at National Journal [here](#).

Also check out United We Dream's new report "Own the Dream: Two Years of DACA: DREAMers and Strategic Partners Taking the Lead from Start to Finish."

What President Obama Did for 'Dreamers' in 2012, He Should Do Again

Two years ago, the administration eliminated the threat of deportation for more than a half-million young people. With Congress intent on blaming that program for current problems and stalled on reform, immigrants need another executive action.

Greisa Martinez, 26, is an organizer for United We Dream, a nonprofit that seeks to address the inequities and obstacles faced by immigrant youth and their families by building a sustainable and robust grassroots movement. Originally from Hidalgo, Mexico, Greisa moved to Dallas, Texas, with her family when she was 7 years old.

On Aug. 15, 2012, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency began accepting applications from certain young undocumented immigrants such as Martinez. The program, known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, offers a group of undocumented immigrants often called "Dreamers" temporary protection from deportation and legal permission to hold a job, continue their educations, or serve in the military.

Two years later, Martinez, one of an estimated 552,000 successful DACA applicants, shares her assessment of the program, a recent congressional vote to repeal it, and [what President Obama should do now with Next America](#).

Two years ago, I was one of 552,000 young people in the United States who celebrated a newfound chance to more fully participate in our society. Two weeks ago, I was one of 552,000 young people in America whose futures Republicans in the House of Representatives deemed expendable.

Since it was first set in motion by executive order in June 2012, the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) program, has provided more than a half-million Dreamers—undocumented young adults like me—the chance to more fully pursue work, education, and other opportunities. Because of DACA, I have a work permit for the first time in my life, and my mother and three sisters no longer worry that I could be separated from them. Yet Republicans in the House voted on Aug. 1 to end DACA and subject Dreamers to deportation.

I have yet to understand why the Republican Party thinks the right response to a 10-year-old fleeing violence in San Pedro Sula, Honduras is to deport a 20-year old Dreamer in San Pedro, Calif.—or in my case, a 26-year old from Dallas, Texas, who has lived, attended school and grown up in the United States for 18 years. But that's apparently what passes for sensible immigration policy in GOP circles these days. Even though DACA eligibility is limited to those of us who arrived in the United States before 2007, Republicans are intent to blame DACA for the rise in Central American children fleeing violence.

Facts seem to carry little weight with a Republican Party intent on blaming President Obama at all costs and

unwilling to budge from an immigration vision that still begins and ends with deporting and dehumanizing immigrants like my mother, Elia Rosas. If Republicans have an alternate policy besides “more deportations,” our community has yet to see it. They’ve blocked legislation, are seeking to end DACA, and are now trying to stop the president from using his existing executive authority to fill the vacuum created by their inaction.

In fact, the House Republicans’ recent vote and the GOP’s larger effort to blame DACA for the surge of kids from Central America should be understood as an attempt to try to preempt President Obama from taking executive action on behalf of undocumented parents like my mother.

DACA works. It protects undocumented young adults brought to the United States as children from deportation and provides us work permits. It opens up new doors of opportunity. A recent survey of DACA recipients commissioned by Unbound Philanthropy and the organization for which I work, United We Dream, found that 70 percent began their first job or moved to a new one after receiving permission to remain in the U.S. through DACA. Another 64 percent said they were less afraid because of their newfound status. For me, it’s meant an opportunity to step out of the shadows, to work, and to further contribute to the country I call my home.

Yet despite the fact that DACA recipients’ lives and futures have changed, our families have remained under siege. The same Obama administration that delivered DACA has also presided over a record-high number of deportations involving other undocumented immigrants. The more than 2 million men, women, and children deported by the Obama administration includes traffic violators, people with families and lives in the United States, and others who would have been eligible for eventual legalization under [blocked legislation](#).

This record-high total includes my father, who after building a life and family here, was unjustly deported in 2008. He was pulled over while driving home from work. For my mother, my deferred action status has meant peace of mind. The thought of losing one of her daughters, as well, is too much for her.

Two years after it began, the DACA program should serve as a foundation for broader relief directed at those who would qualify for legalization under blocked immigration legislation. Parents of Dreamers, parents of U.S. citizens, and Dreamers ineligible for DACA because of its age ceilings are counting on the president. My mother, Elia Rosas, is counting on the President. She has lived here for more than 18 years. She is the head of a mixed-status household that includes two U.S. citizen daughters and two DACA-recipient daughters.

My mother has worked hard to put us through college, and she brought us here from Hidalgo, Mexico, so that we could survive. She had dreams for my sisters and me to receive the education she couldn’t have. My mom always dreamed of being a teacher, and because of her sacrifice, my sister, Dimna, will be starting her first year as a kindergarten teacher next week. Because of my mother’s courage my sister, Girsea, will be starting graduate school this fall. Now my mom’s dream is to be able to work as a substitute teacher at Dimna’s school and drive without fear to visit Girsea on weekends.

Is that really so hard to understand?

Encouraging policies that keep families together should not be controversial. Ensuring that our nation remains a place of opportunity for the young people who call this country home should not be a partisan issue. It’s only through the lens of Washington dysfunction and what I see as growing nativism in the Republican Party that such assertions are controversial.

President Obama has the discretion, legal authority, and moral responsibility to reform his deportation legacy and to build on one of his administration’s successes with DACA. No other family should have to go through what my family has.

The president can stand with our families and fight for our community or he can use the current dysfunction in Washington as an excuse for inaction. Our families, our community, and the arc of history will judge his decision.

Greisa Martinez is an organizer for [United We Dream](#). In 2014, after living in the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant for more than 18 years, she received legal permission to remain through [the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program](#). Before joining United We Dream, she cofounded the Council for Minority Student Affairs, which advocates for the rights of undocumented students, at Texas A&M University.

Tagged as: Dream Act and Immigrant Youth, Obama DREAM relief / Deferred Action / DACA