

'Dreamers deserve the chance to succeed'

U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici says DACA repeal plays political games with the lives of people who deserve a path to citizenship

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"Trump must stop scapegoating immigrants, who have played such an important role in building this country."

REP. SUZANNE BONAMICI
D-OREGON

One out of every eight residents in Congresswoman Suzanne Bonamici's District 1 is Latino or Hispanic, making the repeal the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program a critical policy shift for her constituents.

The decision by the White House clears the way for deporting young adults who were brought to this country when they were children, many of whom know no other country as their home.

Rep. Bonamici, who is also the vice ranking member of the Housing Committee on Education and Workforce, called the decision "heartless," saying it doesn't improve national safety and will have a detrimental effect on the economy. Cutting the program, she said, "sends a message to the rest of the world that our country has lost its humanitarian spirit and inclusive values."

Bonamici took a few minutes out of her schedule while traveling to Washington, D.C., to answer several questions from Street Roots about the White House's decision and the impact it could have on her Latino and Hispanic constituents.

Joanne Zuhl: *What are you hearing from your constituents in Oregon? How much are DACA recipients contributors to your District? What are they asking for?*

Rep. Suzanne Bonamici: Following a meeting in McMinnville earlier this year, a young teenager politely asked me if he could apply early for DACA so he could have the certainty of staying in Oregon. I won't forget the fear in his voice. This particular child was ineligible for DACA because he was too young, but the interaction reiterated to me just how

scared these children are for the future.

The Dreamers whose parents brought them to the United States as children have known no other home. Across Northwest Oregon, Dreamers are going to school, working hard in a variety of industries, and contributing to their communities through paying taxes and doing volunteer work.

These inspiring, hard-working young people are woven into the fabric of our communities and all they ask in return is to have the opportunity to earn their work permits and eventually a pathway to citizenship.

S.R.: *What is being done for DACA recipients right now, and during this 6 months before March 5, the cutoff date?*

S.B.: It's irresponsible and heartless to play political games with young people's lives by announcing that the DACA program will end in six months. Dreamers deserve the chance to succeed. It's difficult to focus on your studies or commit yourself to a job if you think you may soon be forced to leave the only country you've called home. The Trump Administration has created a lot of fear and uncertainty. Congress must put differences aside and pass legislation to make sure the Dreamers can stay. It's been somewhat reassuring to hear colleagues on both sides of the aisle express support for Dreamers; now it's time to put those words into legislation.

S.R.: *You said that "if Congressional leadership is willing, we can make this part of much-needed comprehensive immigration reform." What do you want to see done or changed? Do you want to see more streamlined and accessible paths to citizenship, and if so, what would that look like?*

S.B.: In 2013, the Senate passed bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform that included a path to citizenship, but the House leadership refused to bring the proposal up for debate and a vote. I applauded former President Obama for taking action within his executive authority to bring millions of young Americans out of the shadows.

I stand ready work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle on comprehensive immigration reform. Business owners need reform to eliminate uncertainty surrounding their workforce. Technology companies want an updated visa process to keep skilled

workers in the United States. And families long for the opportunity to build their lives and the peace and security of knowing they are safe together.

S.R.: *I'd like your response to this statement by A.G. Jeff Sessions: "The compassionate thing to do is to end the lawlessness, enforce our laws and, if Congress chooses to make changes to those laws, to do so through the process set forth by our founders in a way that advances the interest of the American people."*

S.B.: The compassionate thing to do is to not pull the rug out from under young people who are loyal to the United States – the only home they've ever known. We shouldn't be punishing these individuals caught in a broken system through no fault of their own. Passing legislation that allows them to stay advances the interest of the American people, and I hope we can do that soon.

S.R.: *The White House is saying DACA recipients are not deportation priorities unless they're criminals, involved in criminal activity or are gang members. Yet DACA youth have to pass a pretty rigorous screening process, and any of the above would either mean either mandatory or discretionary denial. You have met DACA recipients – tell us about the people you meet.*

S.B.: It's important to remember that people who qualify for DACA have already shown that they are not a threat to public safety. The DACA recipients I've met are bright and full of promise, and they love their families and the United States. Many are students, working hard to get an education. But now they are threatened, and that's tragic. With the values of compassion and understanding, why and how could we threaten to deport these people to countries they do not know?

I am the granddaughter of immigrants, and many of our region's leading public figures are immigrants or descendants of immigrants. Trump must stop scapegoating immigrants, who have played such an important role in building this country.

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