

News

Trump Overshadows Young Migrants' Emotional Trip to Mexico

AP reports on the trip of two dozen young immigrants to visit family

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MOLCAXAC, Mexico— Tamara Alcalá Dominguez sobbed, barely able to speak, as she buried her face in the sweater of the woman who cared for her when she was a toddler.

"My little girl, I hugged you so much," Petra Bello Suarez tearfully told her now 23-year-old granddaughter. "I have you in my arms, my girl. ... You found me still alive."

Alcalá's mother left her with Bello at age 2 when she went to seek a better life in the United States.

sands protected from deportation under an Obama administration program known as DACA, or Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which gave work permits to immigrants brought to the U.S. as children and living in the country illegally.

Alcalá burst out of the shadows. In her American home in Everett, Washington, she got an officially sanctioned job and pursued an education with dreams of becoming a doctor.

And last year she enrolled in a special program that allowed her to make this, her first jour-

ney back to Mexico, and then return safely again to the United States.

Grandmother and grandchild spent nearly two weeks catching up on 20 years, a reunion made bittersweet by the

uncertainty ahead: They said their goodbyes just before Donald Trump took office amid vows to undo the protections his predecessor put in place, promises that leave immigrants worried about what comes next.

For Alcalá, the trip may have been either a last opportunity to see her grandmother, or a chance to reacquaint herself with her native land in case she winds up deported.

"It brings a lot of peace of mind to know that I was able to interact with her at least once," she said, "before whatever happens in the future."

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A year later, the little girl joined her mother — and for two decades Alcalá's undocumented status prevented her from returning to Mexico.

Then she became one of the hundreds of thou-

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In the weeks just before Trump was sworn in, more than two dozen young immigrants made the same journey as Alcalá back to Mexico under a provision of DACA that lets recipients apply



This Dec. 23, 2016 photo shows women making tamales in Molcaxac, Puebla state, Mexico. Folks here say so many working-age residents have migrated to the U.S., the town is mostly populated by the elderly and the very young. The first wave of migration started in 1942 with the bracero program, which allowed Mexicans to temporarily, and legally, work in the United States. After the program ended in 1964, people continued to go north illegally.

to leave the U.S. for academic reasons or family emergencies and then legally return. The Associated Press traveled with them.

More than 100 former child migrants have made five such trips sponsored by California State University, Long Beach — emotional journeys to what is often a barely remembered homeland, to reunite with family seen only in photos or on Skype. The students on this trip joined long-lost relatives for Christmas, then gathered after the new year for an academic course in Cuernavaca before flying home to America.

About 750,000 immigrants have enrolled in DACA. Legislation that would have included similar protections, called the DREAM Act, failed to get through Congress, prompting President Barack Obama to create the program with an executive action in 2012.

Trump, as part of his tough talk on immigration, has vowed to end DACA, which he calls illegal amnesty. Moderate Republicans are keenly aware of the political dangers of deporting college students and breaking up families. At a town hall Jan. 12, House Speaker Paul Ryan said Republicans had been working

with the Trump team on a solution and vowed there would be no "deportation force" to round up people living in the country illegally.

Soft-spoken and shy, Alcalá's demeanor reflects an upbringing living with fear of deportation.

Growing up, her family mostly kept to themselves and a few friends. Alcalá's mother encouraged her not to speak Spanish outside the home to avoid attracting attention.

She wasn't to let on that she was Mexican, and never to tell people where her mother worked.

"I always felt like I always had to hide everything," Alcalá said.

Through high school, Alcalá was content with her under-the-table restaurant job. But as college neared, the limitations of her legal status became increasingly clear.

Her job was never going to be enough to pay for tuition. She began to question why her mother brought her to the U.S.

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