

## DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, yesterday I went to Benito Juarez high school in Chicago, in the southwest part of the city, in the Pilsen neighborhood. It has a predominantly Mexican-American enrollment at this high school. It is one of my favorites. I have been there time and again for so many different events. It is full of life and full of some amazing young students and some great teachers and a great principal, Mr. Ocon. I was there 2 weeks ago for a mariachi band ensemble, training students across the city to be musicians in the Mexican tradition. There is so much life there.

But yesterday was not the happiest occasion. It was sad and worrisome. I met with about 20 of the students there, all of whom have been protected by DACA. DACA was President Obama's Executive order that was issued in 2012. That Executive order said that if you were brought to the United States as a child, an infant, a toddler, a young person, and grew up in this country undocumented; if you had no problems of any serious nature with the law; if you finished your education; if you went through a criminal background check and paid a fee, you would be protected and be able to stay in America 2 years at a time to go to school, to work, whatever your aspirations may be.

Under President Obama's Executive order, 780,000 young people came forward, and the 20 I met at Benito Juarez were among them. They got the protection they needed to legally get a job. For a lot of these young students, that is a critical part of their lives because, being undocumented, they don't qualify for any Federal assistance to go to college. If they want to go to college, they have to save up for it, and they have to find the money and work for the tuition and other expenses. So getting a job is a very important part of it.

These young people, as they went through the DACA process, knew that they were safe from being deported. That is a fear which many of us can't even understand, but it is a real fear for many people in this country who are here undocumented. So for these young people, they have that chance.

On September 5, President Trump announced he was ending the DACA protection program as of March 5 of next year, putting an end to the protection these young people have. As their DACA expires, they will be vulnerable to deportation. They will reach the point where they can no longer work in America.

The end of DACA as we know it will dramatically change the lives of thousands of young people. It will change the lives of 900 of these DACA-protected young people who volunteered to serve in our military—currently serving in our military, willing to risk their lives for a country that will not give them legal status. Imagine that for a moment. If they had to prove that

they really cared about America, what more could they do then to put their lives on the line? They have done it, 900 of them. When DACA goes away on March 5 of next year, they have to leave the military service. That is the end of their opportunity to serve America. Many of them are in the military because they bring special skills and special capacities to lead. We will lose them.

It will mean that 20,000 of these DACA-protected young people, when it goes away for them, will no longer be able to teach—20,000 teachers across America. I met one of them yesterday, Katherine Galeano. Katherine, whom I had met before, is a special-ed teacher. Her family originally came from Nicaragua. She told a heartbreaking story about what happened 10 years ago. She was in high school. She was taking a shower in the morning before she was to go to school. There was a knock on the bathroom door. Her mother was crying and screaming: "Come out. Come out." Katherine came out to see her father being handcuffed. They were deporting him to Nicaragua. He was gone. That was the last time he saw her and she saw him—10 years ago. As she told the story, she said that her mother tried to make it as a single mom with her kids here in the United States and finally gave up and went back to Nicaragua, leaving Katherine to raise herself, to pay her own way through college, to get a teaching certificate and teach special-ed in the city of Chicago. As of March 5 next year, Katherine is finished teaching. It is over. DACA is gone.

When I met with these students yesterday, you can imagine what they were worried about. They are worried about themselves and their future. They are worried about their families. They are worried about having turned over all this information to the government when they signed up for DACA which can now be used against them and their families. That is what they are worried about.

Many of them, I am sure, reflect on the fact that this could be their last Christmas in the United States of America. If that seems overly dramatic, then you need to meet them and talk to them and understand the reality of their lives. That is what they face.

While President Trump did prospectively eliminate the DACA Program, he issued a challenge to us. He said to Congress: Now do something. If I am going to eliminate this Executive order, what is Congress going to do in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives? Will you pass a law to deal with this challenge?

He said that in September, and here we are in the middle of December having done nothing—nothing—and the clock is ticking. It is a clock that means an awful lot to thousands of young people across America, including those at Benito Juarez high school in the city of Chicago.

There are people who want to get this fixed, Republicans and Democrats. We need to come together and get this done. There is no excuse for delay. We know what needs to be done. We need to give these young people a chance.

I introduced the DREAM Act 16 years ago here in the Senate, and the DREAM Act said to these young people: We are going to put you on a path to legalization and a path to citizenship. It won't be easy, and it won't be quick, and you will have to show us that you can be a productive part of America's future, but then we will give you your chance. These young people grew up in the United States of America, pledging allegiance to that flag, singing our national anthem, believing in their heart of hearts that this was home, but it really wasn't, legally. They were undocumented and illegal in America. Now the question is, What will we do to make that better, to fix it, to come up with a just solution?

Some of my Republican colleagues say: Well, you have to give us more than just fixing their problem; you have to give us some fix to our immigration system. I am not against that. I was part of a group of eight Senators who spent months together—four Democrats, four Republicans. We crafted a comprehensive immigration bill, which I am proud of. It passed on the floor of the Senate and was sent over to the Republican House of Representatives where they refused to even consider it. They would not bring it up for a vote. It died in the Republican House.

I know this immigration system in America is broken. I have talked about one specific piece of it this morning, but there are many aspects of it that are broken. The Republicans have said to us: Do something to make our borders stronger. Sign me up. I voted for that on the comprehensive immigration bill. Does that mean more technology, more equipment, making certain that it is clear that our border is going to be a real border that you cannot cross at will? Of course. I am prepared to do that, and many Democrats—maybe all the Democrats—would join in that effort. There are things that we can do to fix this system, but what we cannot do is ignore it. We cannot ignore what is happening to these young people, the threat to their future, to their families, and we can't ignore the reality that this is a basic test of who we are as Americans.

I stand here today as the son of an immigrant mother. My mom was brought to this country when she was 2 years old, and thank goodness my grandmother decided to put her on a boat, bring her from Lithuania to the United States. I wouldn't be here otherwise. That is my story, that is my family's story, and that is America's story. That is who we are. I cannot imagine my grandmother and grandfather, whom I never knew, making the decision to come to a country where they didn't even speak the language,

giving up everything and leaving it behind in their mother country of Lithuania to try a new country called the United States of America. That story has been repeated millions of times, and thank goodness it has. They not only brought strong backs and strong minds, but they brought with them a part of their DNA, which was a DNA of culture, courage, and determination, and I think that is part of who we are as Americans—and proud to be.

Let me tell you the story of one of these Dreamers, as I call them, or DACA young people. All of my speeches notwithstanding, these stories tell more about this situation than anything I could possibly say. This is Maria Rocha. I have told stories of Dreamers on the floor; she is 101, I believe, of the list that I have given. She came to the United States at the age of 3, brought from Mexico. Maria grew up in a rural town called Stonewall, TX. Her fondest memories of growing up in the Texas Hill Country include haystack jumping, armadillo chasing, and fishing in a lake. Later in her childhood, Maria's family moved to San Antonio. Maria was a very good student. She graduated from high school twelfth in her class. She played varsity soccer. She was recognized as a San Antonio Scholar Athlete of the Week during her junior year. At the same time, as she was going to school and playing soccer, she was working a job to help support herself and her family.

Maria was accepted at the University of Texas at San Antonio. While enrolled as a full-time student, she kept right on working. In fact, she juggled three different jobs. She was a housekeeper, a babysitter, and a personal assistant. She had to come up with \$40,000 out of pocket to pay for college education. She didn't qualify for any Federal assistance because of her immigration status. So these young students in college are working harder than many others just to make sure they succeed.

In May of 2012, she graduated with a degree in interdisciplinary studies. After graduation, she decided to enter a program known as Teach For America. Almost everyone knows about this program, but they should know that this is a program in which college graduates volunteer to teach in some of the most challenging schools across America. Maria was one of those.

Today, Maria continues her career as a teacher. She teaches third grade in her hometown of San Antonio, TX. At the same time, she is pursuing a graduate degree in education, once again with no Federal assistance, no Federal loans. Without DACA, Maria would not be able to work and could be deported immediately. When asked what would happen to her without DACA protection, which President Trump eliminated as of March 5 next year, Maria only thinks of her students. Here is what she said: How are my students going to take it? What is going to happen to them? That is what scares me.

Nationwide, there are 20,000 DACA recipients just like her. With Teach For America alone, 190 of these undocumented students who have gone on to get degrees in college are teaching in the Teach For America Program. Currently, they are teaching 10,000 students across 11 States, with one-third of them in the State of Texas.

In a few weeks, Congress is going to face the reality of this DACA provision by President Trump coming into full effect. As of that day, she and others like her will start the clock ticking to lose their jobs, be legally unemployed in America.

Christmas is a special time of year for every family of Christian faith and those who observe it. It is a special time of year for my family. The real question though is, Can we leave this week, ignoring this issue? Can we go home and enjoy our Christmas without thinking for a moment of how young people like Maria may be facing their last Christmas in the United States of America? That is the reality of what she faces. So why don't we face this issue?

This is an empty Senate Chamber, which is usually the case, unfortunately. I wish it were filled—filled with a healthy, fulsome debate on this issue. Let's have our disagreements, bring them out. Let's work out our compromises. Let's do something that is really radical around here. Let's come together and legislate—Democrats and Republicans. Let's solve this problem. That is why we were elected, not to collect a paycheck and build a pension but to solve the problems facing America. This one is real, it is timely, and it is now.

Maria Rocha and 780,000 other young people are counting on us to do something. Let's not come up with excuses. Let's come up with answers.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STRANGE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TAX CUTS AND JOBS BILL

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, as I come to the floor today, the Senate is approaching one of our most important votes, really, in years. The tax relief legislation that we will be voting on will be, I believe, great for America, great for the American people, and it will do a lot for the future of our great country. It has been a long process. There has been a lot of discussion, and there has been years of preparation waiting for today's vote.

The Finance Committee has held over 70 hearings on the subject over the last 6 years. When we were debating it

on the floor, we had about 285 amendments offered to this legislation. There have been a lot of changes over the past few weeks to include as many good ideas as possible. After all that, it is understandable that there may be some confusion about what the legislation does. I want to speak today about the various ways that this legislation is good for hard-working Americans, like the people in my home State of Wyoming.

First, most people are going to pay lower tax rates. For a couple who makes between \$19,000 and \$77,000 a year, the rates are going to drop from 15 percent to 12 percent. So a family might see their tax bill drop by more than \$1,000 just from this one part of the Republican tax relief plan alone.

The second thing I want to point out is that this legislation roughly doubles the standard deduction. It goes up to \$12,000 for a single person who files and then to \$24,000 for a married couple. Well, that is double. People will not have to pay Federal income tax on all of that money—none of it at all. It is a standard deduction of \$24,000 for a family. So if we combine that with the lower rates—the lower rates and the higher deduction—it is even more money that people are going to be able to keep of their own money. Instead of having Washington spend it, they can spend it. They are not going to be sending it to Washington for someone else to spend it.

Mr. President, you know as well as I do that people are much better deciders about how their money ought to be spent, and they get a better value for their money than when they send it to Washington for Washington to spend it, supposedly on their behalf. It is not only that. Their taxes might be a lot simpler to figure out come April 15. We have lower rates, a higher standard deduction, and now it is simpler to figure out on April 15.

A lot of people are looking around trying to find deductions they can take and save a little money on their taxes. We have seen that for years—ways to find additional deductions. People save the receipts. Then they look at the receipts. They go through the box and find out what they spent, and how much they spent. They gather up their receipts and fill out extra forms.

Under this tax relief plan, they can choose just to take this much higher standard deduction and not have to spend all that additional time looking through the shoe box of receipts trying to find something they may have spent. This is going to make tax filing a whole lot simpler for lots of Americans.

How many people are going to benefit from this? Today about 70 percent of people who fill out their tax form choose the standard deduction. Under this plan, which doubles the standard deduction, we expect that maybe even more than 9 out of 10 Americans are going to be able to use this simplified way of filling out the tax forms. They