

DACA

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, I am joining my colleagues on the Senate floor because today marks the 14th anniversary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program that we all commonly know as DACA.

When it was created by President Obama back in 2012, the purpose of this program was to protect people who came to the United States as children. But President Obama made clear that legislation was also needed. He knew that Congress needed to pass legislation to give Dreamers a path to citizenship, along with DACA.

There was bipartisan support for it, but unfortunately, since that time, petty politics keep getting in the way. It is having real life consequences on the country, on families, on individuals, and on businesses. Because we are unable to work in a bipartisan way just to put Dreamers and their families on a pathway to citizenship, we are here to talk about a program, DACA. It is important for us to keep in mind why we strive not only to continue this program but to fight for these families.

DACA has become a lifeline for hard-working, inspiring young people who have only ever known this country as their home.

And make no mistake, DACA is not given out freely. You just heard my colleague from Minnesota talk about this. DACA recipients, these applicants, undergo intense background checks, and every 2 years, they have to renew their status and go through another scrutinizing background check.

For the past 14 years, DACA has worked as intended. It has allowed thousands of young people to obtain work permits, and critical protections from deportations are associated with this program because these kids have only known this country and play by the rules and follow the law and just want to go to school and be a part of our workforce and raise their families here. They want an education. They want to build their careers and their lives in the United States.

The DACA Program has been an overwhelming benefit to our country. Ninety-nine percent of the DACA recipients who started the program in 2012 completed high school and got their diplomas—almost every single one. That is the kind of dedication you find in Dreamers.

Additionally, more than 90 percent of DACA recipients over the age of 25 are participating in our workforce, they are building families, they are working hard, and they are paying more than \$2 billion in State and local taxes. And they love this country. They feel as American as every Member of this Chamber.

Yet, over the past 14 years, they have endured attack after attack and been made into pawns by too many politicians. Even still, through it all, I have to tell you, they are thriving, and they are building an American dream. And that is all they are asking from us, is

to allow them to continue to do so. But, right now, our country is breaking its promise to them.

Now, like my colleague DICK DURBIN, the senior Senator from Illinois, who has done an incredible job fighting for our Dreamers and their families—I watch him as he comes to the floor. I have watched him as he has talked about Dreamers and their families and the fight. And I think it is important we keep our voices loud and proud about who they are in our communities. I, too, have stood here on the Senate floor, multiple times now, over the course of the last several months, to talk about this.

This administration is intentionally delaying DACA renewals so DACA recipients go unprotected.

Let me just say that one more time. I get these calls into my office. I know the DACA recipients and Dreamers in my State. I hear from them all the time. This administration is intentionally delaying DACA renewals so DACA recipients go unprotected.

How do I know that? Because DACA recipients have told me. In my State, they have been applying months ahead of their 2-year deadline—months ahead of that 2-year deadline—but for many, that is still not enough time before their status expires. This expiration and this delay of approving their application, it is all part of this administration's plan to attack and undermine immigration and these DACA recipients.

Now, I want to be clear about something: We all agree that we need strong border security and that criminals need to face justice. Listen, I spent my career doing just that. There is no question about it.

But instead of focusing on the “worst of the worst,” like President Trump promised to do, he and Stephen Miller are directing Federal immigration enforcement to go after DACA recipients—mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers—with absolutely no criminal record.

Why? Because they had the audacity to be brought here as children, because they have only ever known this country as their home.

Why, instead of going after actual criminals, is this administration focused on young men and women who are woven into the fabric of their communities?

I think I know why. It is because DACA recipients look a little different or sound a little different from what the Trump administration has decided are real Americans and what they should sound like and look like. It is because DACA recipients' shining successes prove that immigrants are actually a benefit to the United States, not a detriment, as this administration would have you believe.

The actions of this administration to delay DACA renewals are about as un-American as you can get.

I have been hearing and sharing stories of DACA recipients who have

struggled with these delays, but I don't think people really understand the toll this is taking on thousands of families across the country.

When someone's DACA status expires, they lose their work permit. Some workers are placed on leave until their status gets renewed, but some permanently lose their jobs. That means a source of income a family relies on is now gone. That is why they apply for the renewal months in advance, so they can continue to go to their job, so they can continue to pay taxes, be a part of our community, pay rent. And they believe in that community.

If they had U.S. citizen children, critical support for them now is gone because of the delays by this administration. If they had employer-sponsored healthcare, now that is gone too. And if they didn't, then healthcare is even harder to afford for them because they lost their work permit. And the only thing they did was have the audacity to apply for renewal months in advance.

It is now more difficult for them to take care of disabled, elderly, or sick relatives, not to mention that there is the constant threat of being sent away from their family to a country they have never known hanging over their heads.

That is all piled on top of the enormously high costs of groceries, gas, electricity, and healthcare that all Americans are experiencing under this administration.

So imagine being a DACA recipient who has lived your whole life in this country, except for a few years, when you were a baby. For over a decade, your government has told you that if you play by the rules and you contribute, you will be able to work and be protected from deportation.

So you go to school, you get a job, you play by the rules, you follow the law, you meet someone, you settle down, and you start a family, like any American would do. And then your government—the same one you support with your hard-earned tax dollars—turns on you.

You know, I don't know about all of you, but that is just unacceptable to me.

DACA recipients are not the only ones being punished. These delays are hurting our businesses and our communities as well. I can't stress that enough.

This administration thinks they are going after these individuals, and they want to deport them. But it is not individual DACA recipients and their families that are suffering. It is our businesses and our communities as well.

A police chief in California was here in Washington, last month, to talk to us about how delays in DACA renewals are hurting his police department. One of his officers was recently unable to work for a while, while he waited for his renewal application to process. Local law enforcement is already

stretched thin. So you should know this. Now, this administration is even making it worse.

Small businesses, retailers, construction companies, they are all losing their employees they depend on. How do I know? Because I hear from my small businesses in Nevada about this very issue.

Approximately 37,000 healthcare workers are DACA recipients. Now, if they can't go to their job, what do you think that does to our healthcare industry, which is already stretched because of the policies of this administration?

Hurting DACA recipients is hurting our country. It is more important than ever that we recognize the fact that, in light of the upcoming celebrations for America's 250th birthday, we have to recognize our contributions and our service to the members in our country who are a big part of it. Our 250th anniversary is a critical reminder that our great Nation only exists because of immigrants. We all have a story. We all have it—every single one of us. I do.

My grandfather came from Chihuahua, Mexico. He came into the United States, served in our military, and became a U.S. citizen. I have a great-grandfather who came to Ellis Island from Italy. He ended up in Kansas City, MO, of all places, raising his family, where my mother was born. We all have this story. That is what makes this country so great. That is why people come here.

And it should be that, yes, if you want to come to a country and you want to follow the rules—you want to follow the rules—you want to follow the law, work hard, you should be able to come here and get ahead. That is the country I know and love, and to lose sight of that is to spit on everything our country stands for.

The Declaration of Independence was written because immigrants and sons of immigrants, daughters of immigrants, grandsons, granddaughters of immigrants came together to escape tyranny and live their lives freely.

Every time I walk on the floor of the Senate, I think about my grandfather and my great-grandfather coming to this country. If they would have ever thought that one day they would have a granddaughter or a great-granddaughter that would walk on the floor of the U.S. Senate representing this country, it is beyond what they could have ever dreamed for. But they hoped. They had hoped for a life better for their children and grandchildren.

And DACA recipients are asking for the same freedoms and opportunities that our Founding Fathers envisioned for this country 250 years ago.

And I will say: It is time we stand with them. It is time we do right and we recognize the importance of those words in our Constitution, what our Founding Fathers stood for, how we stood on shoulders of others to get here. And those shoulders were immigrants.

We don't pull up the ladder behind us, but we make sure everybody has an opportunity to be a part of this beautiful country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

DACA

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am honored to join my colleagues this afternoon in celebrating the Deferred Action for Children Arrivals, or DACA, Program and its absolutely historic impact on our country, but also to mourn and to express outrage at the all-out assault launched against this program by the Trump administration.

The point of it, once again, seems to be cruelty—purposeful, relentless cruelty—which we have seen in the implementation of immigration practices in so many different ways by this administration.

Just this morning—literally, this morning—I participated in the announcement of a lawsuit against the government by a woman who was seized from her car taking her children to school, a year ago, leaving her children unattended in the car, shackled, sent to a detention center, and then summarily deported without even a shred of due process. And she is suing the U.S. Government because she is still in Mexico, separated from her two young children—at the time, 13 and 8 years old—as well as her husband.

She was on a screen today from Mexico—heartbreaking—as her two children listened to her in the Yale Law School conference room where the lawsuit was announced.

This kind of cruelty should have no place in our great country. I don't recognize the America that separates a mother from her children without any reason. She has no criminal record. She has been in this country for 15 years. Her two children are American citizens because they were born here. Cruelty and stupidity.

DACA, since its creation 14 years ago, has transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people—people who came to this country as infants or young children—and it has given them the opportunity to work, to contribute; to educate, to support their families; to contribute to this great country. There are nurses, doctors, and engineers. They strengthen America. DACA has strengthened America.

In Connecticut alone, numerous DACA recipients actively contribute to our economy and enrich our communities. And yet despite the enormous, obvious, indisputable benefits of this program, the Trump administration has declared war on DACA.

Again, the point seems to be cruelty. The administration has slow-walked DACA renewals. They have purposely allowed Dreamers' work authorizations to expire through no fault of their own—cruelty and stupidity because they are harming the employers who

depend on those DACA workers and the skills that they bring to jobs every day.

The Department of Education has investigated five universities that offer financial help to DACA recipients. What purpose does it serve to punish universities for developing talent that will then serve our country?

In the latest affront to legal protections, the Board of Immigration Appeals has ruled that DACA status alone will not shield Dreamers from deportation, despite the fact that DACA is a mechanism of deferred action.

I mentioned the title in the first sentence of my remarks here—Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program—because the point is action is deferred. And now the administration is defying the law and common sense in this policy of stupidity and cruelty.

As a result of these illegal policy changes, DACA recipients have not only lost their sense of safety and security but, in some cases, their freedom—and their place in this country. It is the only place they call home. English is the only language many of them speak. And we are depriving them of that sense of home and security and safety.

I will just give you one example: Jose, of Connecticut. He is a DACA recipient. He came to Connecticut from Mexico when he was young. Thanks to DACA, he was able to put himself through college while working full time, and he built a successful career at a Fortune 500 company. He has worked there for 12 years. And now, because of the Trump administration's efforts to delay renewal requests at USCIS, Jose's DACA status and his work permit have not been renewed. No fault of his own. Jose lost the job. He lost that job that he held for 12 years, and today he is struggling to pay his bills. He faces eviction.

What purpose does it serve to drive him into financial peril and even bankruptcy, to deprive his employer of his skills, to, in effect, make him homeless?

President Trump's treatment of DACA recipients is the latest failure of his promise that his immigration efforts would focus on the worst of the worst.

Americans like the idea of deporting dangerous criminals, people who have been convicted of crimes—not Nancy Martinez, who was separated from her children as she took them to work in her car, having committed no crime; not Jose, who is the opposite of the worst of the worst, a productive member of our society, doing good work at a good corporation over 12 years.

These DACA recipients like Jose are far from the worst of the worst. They are our neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and friends. They are some of the best—not the worst—of us.

We are not talking here about securing our borders. We are not talking about deporting dangerous criminals. We are talking about rolling back and