

Danger of Mass Deportations Grows as US Senate Refuses to Protect Immigrant Youth

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Hundreds of thousands of immigrants brought to the US as children face an increased threat of deportation after the Senate rejected a series of proposals to couple legal status for those covered by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program with stepped-up repressive measures against immigrants, including Trump's wall along the US-Mexico border.

Four votes were taken, each to close debate on a specific immigration measure, and all four fell short of the 60 votes required to end debate and force a vote on final passage. Three of the measures dealt directly with those covered by the DACA program, which Trump cancelled last September, setting a deadline of March 5 for expiration—at which point nearly 800,000 young people brought here as children could face deportation.

These included two bipartisan plans, named after their lead Republican and Democratic sponsors, the McCain-Coons amendment, and the Collins-King amendment. Both these bills provided for legal status and a 10 to 12-year path to citizenship for DACA recipients, with the Collins bill providing more money for “border security” than the McCain bill, and explicitly approving the wall.

The Democratic leadership went all-out to back the Collins-King bill, and 45 Democrats, including Elizabeth Warren and “independent” Bernie Sanders, backed a measure that would have increased funding for border militarization and expanded funding for internal deportation operations by \$25 billion.

The third bill, backed by the Senate Republican leadership, incorporated all four “pillars” demanded by the Trump White House, including drastic cuts in legal immigration. Three Democrats voted for this bill, but nearly a dozen Republicans opposed it because they oppose granting any path to citizenship for DACA recipients, no matter how onerous.

The fourth bill was unrelated to DACA, but was introduced by Republicans seeking to punish so-called sanctuary cities that limit cooperation by local police with federal immigration agencies. Significantly, four Democrats, including Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, backed this ultra-right measure.

The dangerously xenophobic framework of the entire immigration debate was suggested in a passing reference made by Republican Senator Lindsay Graham at a press conference before the vote. “There’s some crazy people around here” making immigration policy, he said, referring to Trump’s top policy adviser Stephen Miller and the press spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security, Tyler Houlton, who previously worked for Representative

Tom Tancredo, a notorious anti-immigrant demagogue.

In effect, Graham was admitting that Trump has given fascists the power to direct the White House's immigration policy, noting that Miller and Tancredo are "running the show." Graham made this comment while calling attention to a DHS press release published yesterday that can only be called a fascist diatribe.

The press release says the Collins bill "destroys the ability of the men and women from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to remove millions of illegal aliens" and calls for overturning the 2001 Supreme Court decision *Zadvydas v. Davis*, which ruled that the government cannot jail immigrants indefinitely or abolish due process for immigrants outright. The press release called this case a "loophole" that will help "ensure a massive wave of new illegal immigration."

The issuance of such a statement by a US government department, attacking senators by name and accusing them of aiding criminals, is completely unprecedented. It gives voice to the powerful anti-democratic and authoritarian tendencies within the US ruling elite, of which the Trump administration is an expression.

In seeking to pass the Collins proposal, the Democratic Party pandered to these extreme-right elements, touting the amendment's right-wing content and its alignment with the demands of President Trump.

Collins's co-sponsor, independent Senator Angus King, quoted Donald Trump's tweet from January 9 in which the president said,

"We're going to come up with DACA, we're going to do DACA and then we can start immediately on phase 2 which would be comprehensive."

King said this was "the premise we've worked on." He asked Trump to support their effort, proclaiming,

"All of us here stand ready" to vote on broader immigration restrictions "next week."

He added, "This is merely a first step," a sentiment seconded by another backer of the proposal, Republican Mike Rounds, who said the amendment would "begin the process to end chain migration" (ultra-right terminology for family reunification) and is "a step in the right direction."

The proposal's chief sponsor, Republican Susan Collins, also pleaded with the far-right to accept her amendment. She made clear that the Democratic-backed proposal would not expand family-based migration, claiming "the opposite is the truth."

Collins said the bill "would send a strong message to people who come to this country illegally" in the future that "they are going to be a priority for deportation, just the way someone who has committed a felony is a priority for deportation." King further clarified that the bill would not prevent ICE and border patrol from rounding up any and all immigrants.

“‘Prioritize’ doesn’t mean to the exclusion of other groups ... it doesn’t mean you’re prohibited from all other deportation activities.”

The comments by King, Rounds, and Collins reveal that regardless of whether a deal is made this week, the two parties are paving the way for broader anti-immigrant legislation that will further strengthen the far-right elements within the state, providing the immigration agencies with billions more for deportation raids and arrests.

Congress is likely to break for recess next Friday without passing any measures protecting DACA. With the budget funded through March 23 after Democrats helped pass Trump’s massive military expansion last week, it is unlikely any deal will be made until the March 5 DACA expiration passes. Tens of thousands of DACA recipients and DACA-eligible immigrants could face deportation in the coming weeks.

Though two federal district courts recently granted temporary orders blocking the DACA rescission from taking immediate effect, the courts are incapable of providing the immigrant youth with any lasting protection. Neither ruling prevents Trump from reissuing his rescission order on different grounds. One of the district court judges who put a hold on the rescission, Nicholas Garaufis, ruled Tuesday that the Trump administration “indisputably can end the DACA program. Nothing in the Constitution or the Immigration and nationality Act requires immigration authorities to grant deferred action or work authorization without lawful immigration status.”

Among DACA recipients, anger is reaching a boiling point.

“I’m very sad and I’ve lost all faith,” wrote one DACA recipient in an online forum.

“Democrats [mess] everything up,” wrote another.

A third immigrant wrote,

“Everyone is to blame at this point, both Dems and Repubs.”

The Socialist Equality Party rejects the whole framework of the immigration debate in Washington. The SEP demands full, immediate citizenship rights for all undocumented people, the dismantling of ICE, border patrol, and DHS, and the guaranteed right of all people to travel the world as they please without intimidation or threat of deportation.

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