

Homeland Security chief defends deportation of DREAMer immigrant

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In a joint interview with Attorney General Jeff Sessions broadcast by MSNBC on Friday, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly defended the deportation of Juan Manuel Montes, a 23-year-old Mexican native who was expelled from the US in February despite being actively enrolled in the Obama-era Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA), which is supposed to protect undocumented immigrants who were brought to the US as children from being deported.

Montes' case, the first reported deportation of a so-called DREAMer, the nickname for DACA enrollees, came to the attention of the public on Tuesday when lawyers for Montes filed suit in federal court in Southern California to demand that the Trump administration release documents relating to his case.

Montes, who has lived in the US since he was nine, was arrested, interrogated and walked across the border from Calexico to Mexicali on February 17 despite being covered by the DACA program through 2018. Under the program, enrollees are required to reapply every two years.

Montes' lawyers explain in court filings that their client was mugged and beaten in Mexicali and, desperate to return to his home and family, tried to scale a border wall two days later, only to be caught by US border police and deported once again to Mexico.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which oversees Customs and Border Protection and its tens of thousands of border police, has refused all requests from Montes' defense team for documents on the case. In response to the lawsuit, it claims that Montes was not deported on February 17, but voluntarily crossed into Mexico without obtaining prior permission from US Citizenship and Immigration Services, the federal agency that approves DACA applications.

That, according to DHS, along with four prior convictions for petty offenses—one for shoplifting and three for driving without a license—invalidated his DACA status. However, US Citizenship and Immigration Services had ruled that these offenses were not sufficiently serious to vacate Montes' DACA status, extending it through 2018.

In the interview on Friday, Kelly, a retired Marine general, repeated the official DHS line—a combination of half-truths and outright lies—concerning Montes' deportation. He said Montes had been an active DACA enrollee but had ceased to be one when he supposedly chose to cross into Mexico. In addition, Kelly maintained, Montes' own behavior—meaning his prior convictions—had deprived him of DACA protection.

Kelly's statements made it clear that the Trump administration, despite previous pledges by Trump himself not to target DACA enrollees—close to 800,000 people—for deportation, has no intention of keeping the promise that was made to those who applied for the program under Obama that they would be able to live and work in the US without fear of being deported.

These young men and women reported themselves to immigration authorities and submitted to background checks. Now, their identities and addresses known to the authorities, they are prime targets for deportation.

Kelly was interviewed while sitting alongside Attorney General Jeff Sessions, a long-time anti-immigrant zealot. In an appearance Wednesday on Fox News, in response to the filing of the suit on behalf of Montes, Sessions made it clear that the Trump administration plans to deport millions of undocumented workers, including DACA enrollees.

“Everybody in the country illegally is subject to being deported,” he declared. “So people come here and they stay here a few years and somehow they think

they are not subject to being deported. Well, they are.”

Kelly and Sessions are touring cities on the Southwestern border to demonstrate their determination to “secure the border” and encourage Customs and Border Protection agents to escalate their already brutal campaign against so-called “illegal aliens.”

In separate speeches earlier this week, both Kelly and Sessions attacked “lax border enforcement” under previous administrations and blamed it for the alleged spread of M-13, a Central America-based gang. Sessions said so-called “sanctuary cities”—those that refuse to allow their police to effectively function as border police and arbitrarily harass and detain immigrants—were responsible for the spread of M-13 and other criminal gangs.

The pair was greeted by protesters in El Paso, where Sessions’ characterization of the city as a “beachhead” and “ground zero” outraged immigrants and immigration advocates. Sessions had previously made similar remarks in Nogales, Arizona, where he called the Southwestern border a “war zone” in which “hardworking ranchers” vie with lawless gangs and drug cartel mules. Standing under the desert sun, Sessions brayed, “This is the Trump era.”

In another interview this week, Sessions denounced Hawaii-based federal judge Derrick Watson for holding up Trump’s travel ban on six Muslim-majority countries. “I really am amazed that a judge sitting on an island in the Pacific can issue an order that stops the President of the United States from what appears to be clearly his statutory and constitutional power,” he said on the right-wing Mark Levin talk radio program. Sessions also inveighed against the “very liberal Ninth District” federal appeals court.

As Sessions concluded the tour on Friday, he reaffirmed that the Trump administration intends to deprive sanctuary cities and states of federal funding. He mentioned the state of California in addition to the municipalities of New York, Seattle, Chicago and El Paso.



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