

In budget talks, Senate Democrats abandon immigrant Dreamers threatened with deportation

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Negotiations over the federal budget and immigration “reform” have resumed after the Democrats voted Monday to end a three-day government shutdown without protection for any of the 800,000 immigrants covered by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program.

Trump previewed the White House’s latest proposal in an impromptu press conference Wednesday, indicating that he was open to extending the end of DACA past the March 5 deadline so that a deal could be reached.

While the official White House proposal, drafted by Trump’s fascistic domestic policy adviser Stephen Miller and chief of staff John Kelly, will not officially be released until Monday, the *New York Times* reported that it offers a path to citizenship for current DACA recipients in return for a crackdown on legal immigration and further ramping up of deportations of the undocumented.

“Tell them not to be concerned. Tell them not to worry, we’re going to solve the problem,” Trump told reporters Wednesday night. “We’re going to morph into it. It’s going to happen,” Trump said about the possibility of citizenship for those with DACA status.

According to the *Times*, the plan would allow for 690,000 so-called Dreamers and 1.1 million other young immigrants who qualified for the program but never applied to gain citizenship over a period of 10-12 years, with the condition that they must avoid any legal infractions. In exchange, the White House is demanding \$25 billion to fund Trump’s proposed border wall, a dramatic increase in immigrant detentions and deportations, a crackdown on those who overstay visas, an end to laws that allow citizens and

green-card holders to bring their parents to the US, and the elimination of a State Department program that encourages immigration from underrepresented countries (the “visa lottery”).

During the press conference Wednesday night, Trump rejected the notion that demanding funding for the wall was a non-starter: “No. I don’t [believe the wall is off the table]. In fact, I just watched [Democratic Senator] Joe Manchin and he said Schumer does not mean that and said it very strongly.”

Prior to last weekend’s shutdown, Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer promised Trump in a private meeting that the Democrats would provide funding for his border wall, an offer Schumer has since publicly rescinded. Manchin rebuffed Schumer’s public remarks Wednesday, telling CNN, “We have to have border security. We know that. So, if the president calls it a border wall, we do need a wall. We need to repair some wall. We need to build some new wall. We need other technologies too.”

After the vote to reopen the government, the Democrats have dropped any effort to tie a legislative deal on DACA to budget negotiations, in return for a pledge from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell that he intends to bring an immigration bill up for debate if a deal cannot be reached before February 8, when the current short-term budget resolution expires.

With an immigration bill, including a possible deal on DACA, no longer tied to the budget, there is no guarantee that if the Senate passes a bill that it would be taken up for consideration by the House of Representatives or supported by the White House.

“We’re viewing [immigration and spending] on separate terms because they are on separate paths,”

Senate Minority Whip Richard Durbin told reporters on Tuesday. Durbin, who has been the leading Democrat in bipartisan negotiations with the White House, asserted that McConnell's mealy-mouthed assurance was a "significant step forward."

Other leading Democrats have ruled out another government shutdown as part of the deal with McConnell. "Feb. 8, we're going to have another [stopgap bill]. But we have to have that budget agreement in order to move forward ... That's the goal," Democratic Senator Patty Murray told reporters. "And then the deal is that if DACA is not part of that, then it will be the next thing considered."

The DACA recipients are being used as a bargaining chip by the Democrats and Republicans as they work out right-wing measures, including significant curbs to legal immigration, such as the end of so-called "chain migration" provisions, which allow for family reunification, and the further militarization and fortification of the US-Mexico border.

President Trump issued an executive order in September ending the Obama-era program that provides temporary legal status for undocumented immigrants who were brought to the US as children, allowing them to attend college, get a driver's license and work. Hundreds of recipients have already lost their protected status without the ability to apply for a renewal, and tens of thousands will be at risk of losing their jobs and being deported without a legislative fix before the March 5 deadline.

Even though a recent court order by a California district judge blocked the rescission of DACA, allowing for current recipients to apply for renewal of their temporary legal status, the ruling, which is being appealed by the Trump administration, may well be overturned.

Throughout the negotiations the Democrats have used the plight of the DACA recipients to simultaneously pose as defenders of immigrants while shifting ever further to the right, closer to the Trump administration's proposed attacks on immigrants, both "legal" and undocumented. While posturing as opponents of Trump's border wall, the Democrats have repeatedly reiterated their demands for further militarizing the border with hundreds more border agents, hundreds of miles of fencing, surveillance cameras and drones.

Senator Bernie Sanders declared his eagerness to militarize the southern border during negotiations earlier this month, telling a television interviewer, "I don't think there's anybody who disagrees that we need strong border security. If the president wants to work with us to make sure we have strong border security, let's do that."

The Democrats have continued to seek to accommodate Trump's demands even after his racist outburst during negotiations, when the president questioned why immigrants were coming to the US from "shithole" countries in Africa instead of Norway.



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