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SENATE REPUBLICANS SIGNAL SUPPORT FOR 'DREAMERS,' WITH CONDITIONS

Democrats oppose tying program to tighter immigration enforcement within U.S.

By Laura Meckler
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WASHINGTON – Key Senate Republicans signaled Tuesday support for legislation allowing so-called Dreamers to stay in the U.S., but said they want it paired with immigration enforcement inside the U.S., as well as border security.

Those conditions would make finding agreement difficult. Democrats say they want Congress to legalize young undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children but they oppose tying the program to enforcement measures beyond border security.

Debating the issue at a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Republicans offered lists of enforcement measures that they suggested might be included in a package with the "Dreamer" program. Sen. John Cornyn (R., Texas) said young people "should not be penalized for being brought here illegally through no fault of their own." But he added what he called a "big caveat."

"Before we provide legal status to these young people, we must reassure and actually regain the public confidence that we're serious when it comes to enforcing the law and securing our borders," he said.

The committee's chairman, Sen. Charles Grassley (R., Iowa), suggested provisions such as requiring all employers to use the e-Verify system to check whether potential employees have authorization to work, making it easier to deport criminals and speeding up deportation for asylum seekers who can't prove their claims.

"I'm confident that if everybody is reasonable, we can reach a solution," he said.

At the same time, Trump administration officials sided with Democrats on another issue, saying it was a bad idea to give people legal status without the ability to become citizens, contradicting Republicans who are advocating that approach as a middle ground.

"Creating second-class citizens or people who never are able to naturalize is not a good model," said Michael Dougherty, assistant secretary for border immigration and trade policy at the Department of Homeland Security.

The issue of these young immigrants took on urgency last month when Mr. Trump **ended the Obama-era program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals**, or DACA. Under a six-month phaseout, some 690,000 young people in the program will begin losing their protection from deportation and work permits starting in March. Those whose two-year permits expire before March 5 are allowed to renew one more time, with a deadline to submit applications set for Thursday.

In announcing his decision, Mr. Trump said that he wanted legislation to replace DACA, but many Republicans are insisting that this be combined with enforcement provisions. Democrats said they would negotiate but that Republicans shouldn't try to include every enforcement idea on their list.

"Please do not put the burden on the Dreamers to accept every aspect of comprehensive immigration reform (in order) to have a chance to become citizens of the United States. That's too much to ask," said Sen. Dick Durbin (D., Ill.), an original sponsor of the Dream Act that inspired the "Dreamer" moniker.

Sen. Thom Tillis (R., N.C.) agreed. He said he favors adding border security measures but not the "laundry list" of other items and he said he hopes Congress acts quickly.

"We need to stop talking about it and solve it," he said. "I urge my colleagues to not make this be something that goes on and on and on. We know what the problem is, we know what a reasonable solution is, and we should provide it."

Mr. Trump appeared to reach the **outlines of an agreement** to pair a DACA replacement with border security over dinner last month with Congress' top two Democrats, Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York and Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California.

At that dinner, Democrats said the trio agreed to border security measures not including Mr. Trump's promised southern border wall, and for a moment it seemed a deal might come together quickly.

Other Republicans quickly weighed in and several suggested that enforcement inside the country would have to be part of the package. Immigrant activists oppose that, with Dreamer groups saying they don't want legalization if it puts their parents into greater jeopardy.

On Monday night, Mr. Trump had dinner with a group of five Republican lawmakers interested in immigration. One person familiar with the discussion said participants came away with the impression that Mr. Trump was taking a tougher line than he appeared to take over dinner with the Democrats.

House Speaker Paul Ryan (R., Wis.) **created a GOP working group on the issue** that includes a wide range of views on the matter, including some of the strongest backers of tougher enforcement. Any agreement reached by that group is likely to include elements of interior enforcement as well as border security.

As Thursday's deadline to sign up for renewals approached, immigrant advocates were helping people fill out paperwork, and pro-immigration lobby groups were highlighting the issue. The group Fwd.us, for example, flew in about 115 young "Dreamers" from 25 states to lobby members of Congress.

"How would you feel if you were one of those Dream Act kids knowing the only thing between you and certainty is Congress?" Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) asked administration officials at the Senate hearing Tuesday. When the officials stumbled trying to reply, Mr. Graham joked, "Never mind. I withdraw that question."

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