



Congress must find a solution to DACA or the U.S. risks losing on the investment it's made



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By C. L. Max Nikias

In one of Euripides' more poignant plays, written at the start of the Peloponnesian War, the citizens of democratic Athens must decide whether to make a practical choice or a humane one.

In "Children of Heracles," a rival empire warns Athens to return the asylum-seeking children of the late Heracles, who was an enemy of that state. The opponents of Athens suggest that a democratic society lacks the stern backbone to make ruthless, pragmatic choices. Yet the Athenians in the end choose the humane option and side with Heracles' progeny.

It is a reminder that democracies, from the beginning, have agonized over the moral issues at the heart of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, whose fate Congress must now resolve in the coming months.

As a member of the executive committee of the Association of American Universities, I continue to advocate alongside the presidents of peer research universities to strongly urge Congress to find a pathway that will allow DACA beneficiaries currently in college to complete their studies here in the U.S. Completing a

degree is no easy undertaking – it takes hard work, focus, and commitment. The uncertainty DACA beneficiaries find themselves in – in particular those currently enrolled in degree programs at U.S. universities – will make the road ahead a daunting one.

We do not want to see students have their studies interrupted, and have asked Congress to find a permanent solution to this so we do not find ourselves in this position again several years from now.

Beyond the conflict of values involved in balancing humane considerations with

legal and security considerations, there is another pragmatic issue at stake: the reversal of DACA puts our nation in the precarious position of having invested in the education of 10,000 university graduates per year – yet walking away from the enormous economic and cultural benefits this investment would reap.

DACA graduates pay taxes, create jobs and add to the rich fabric of American innovation. And make no mistake: we are invested in their success in the same way we are invested in the success of any other student that graduates from an American university. Multiple studies confirm that we reap a many-fold return on this investment.

If we do not act to find a way to keep DACA beneficiaries here, we will have wasted the tens of millions of dollars already invested in Dreamers, to make a point that may be neither benevolent nor economically pragmatic. Temporary solutions will not work. Revisiting this issue again and again would be counterproductive.

My wife and I came to the United States four decades ago to pursue the dream of a better life through better education. As naturalized citizens, we sense deeply the foundational role that higher education plays in equalizing society, in enabling everyone to succeed and flourish both personally and professionally.

Thinking back to the moment we arrived at John F. Kennedy Airport to pursue our studies, I cannot help but remember how optimistic we were about the future. We felt grateful that we could belong to this society, and to contribute to it. With the legal peril facing DACA beneficiaries today, I cannot imagine optimism is a feeling many of them would share. On campus, we have offered a host of resources that we hope our DACA students will take advantage of. But universities can only do so much. A long-term solution to this issue must come from Congress, and I urge our representatives to act quickly and decisively.



University of Southern California president C. L. Max Nikias holds eight patents in digital signal processing and is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a charter fellow of the National Academy of Inventors (NAI).