

SEEING THROUGH THE DREAMERS MAZE

Given the normalization of hysteria in America, it was predictable that hyperbole would govern much of the discussion—if we can call it that—over the so-called Dreamers, the almost 800,000 young people who were brought to the United States illegally, mostly from Latin America. It's time to see through the Dreamers maze.

This is one problem where culpability escapes neither Party: with some important exceptions, both the Republicans and the Democrats have shown little or no interest in grappling with the macro issue of immigration, and the micro issue of the Dreamers. They would prefer that the executive branch, or the courts, handle this matter, though this is clearly the purview of the Congress.

The last time comprehensive immigration reform was passed was in 1986, the Simpson-Mazzoli bill. In 2013, the *Washington Post* did a splendid piece explaining why “the 1986 reform act didn't work.”

“The law was supposed to put a stop to illegal immigration into the United States once and for all,” the newspaper said. “Instead, the exact opposite happened. The number of unauthorized immigrants living in the country soared, from an estimated 5 million in 1986 to 11.1 million today.” It blamed an ill-crafted amnesty provision and the absence of meaningful enforcement mechanisms.

In the 16 years that President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama were in office, nothing was done by the Congress. Though they will deny it, the Republicans like the cheap labor that the business community applauds, and the Democrats like the cheap votes that government largess affords.

Obama proved to be more aggressive than Bush. When the Congress failed to do its job and pass immigration legislation, he took it upon himself to implement the provisions that the Congress explicitly rejected. This was an unconstitutional power grab by an Imperial president. In 2015, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals said as much, and last year the U.S. Supreme Court kept the brakes in place.

This is the mess that the Congress, Bush, and Obama left for President Donald Trump. His decision to force the Congress to do what it is constitutionally authorized to do—pass immigration legislation—was legally sound and procedurally commendable. But that doesn't settle the matter.

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders has made it clear that the Trump administration has not changed course. "The priorities remain the same: criminals, security threats and those who repeatedly violate our immigration laws." What about the Dreamers?

Trump is on record saying that he is "not after the Dreamers," and that they "should rest easy." He has stressed that "we are after the criminals." But as Sanders said, he not only wants the Congress to address this issue, he is asking all members to commit to comprehensive immigration reform.

Trump's critics have slammed him for lacking compassion. But as Sanders indicated, where is the compassion for those who have been displaced from the workforce by the Dreamers? She pointed out that "there are over 4 million unemployed Americans in the same age group [as the Dreamers]." In that group, "950,000 of those are African American," and "over 870,000 unemployed Hispanics [are] in the same age group."

To be sure, the issue of the Dreamers is tricky for Trump. For example, in the election of 2012, by a margin of 55 percent to 42 percent, voters said that Mitt Romney shared their values more than President Obama did. But when voters looking for

empathy in a candidate were asked to choose, Obama won 81 to 18. While empathy is a virtue for those who deal with pastoral issues, it is not a sufficient attribute for governing.

It is time to exhale: The Dreamers are not about to be booted. Those whose legal status has been approved, which is almost all of them, are good for up to two years, and those whose permits are due to expire in the next six months have until October 5 to renew.

“This gives Congress at least some time to enact the current Dreamer legalization process in a statute that is the proper legal path under the Constitution’s separation of powers,” says a *Wall Street Journal* editorial. It adds that “Mr. Trump signaled his willingness to sign such a bill.” He should. Penalizing the Dreamers because of the ineptitude of the Republicans and Democrats is indefensible.

Will such a bill reach the president’s desk? Democrat Senator Dick Durbin, an original author of the Dream Act, said, “I am hoping that this is a moment where we are forced to finally do something.” Agreed. And if this does happen, it will be because Trump forced Congress to do its job.