

# The Dallas Morning News

## **CORNYN HELPS TEXAS BUSINESS COALITION LAUNCH EFFORT TO URGE CONGRESS TO PROVIDE 'DREAMERS' WITH PERMANENT LEGAL STATUS**

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WASHINGTON – A new Texas business coalition is urging Congress to pass legislation that would provide permanent legal status for “Dreamers” – those unauthorized immigrants, including more than 100,000 in Texas alone, who were brought to the U.S. as children.

The group, the Texas Opportunity Coalition, launched on Tuesday with support from Texas Sen. John Cornyn, a Republican whose vote would be key for any such measure to succeed in the Senate.

The senator said that “after years of being yanked around from court ruling to court ruling” over DACA, the “deferred action for childhood arrivals” program launched by former President Barack Obama, “these young men and women deserve certainty to be able to plan their future.”

“The only way to do that is through legislation,” Cornyn said in a taped statement played at a virtual news conference.

The new coalition represents a partnership between the **Texas Business Leadership Council** and the Texas Business Immigrant Coalition, along with entities ranging from the University of Texas at Dallas to the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce to the North Texas Commission.

Those business leaders are hoping to capitalize on a change in political leadership in D.C., now that President Joe Biden is in the White House and Democrats control the House and Senate. But their push is bipartisan, nodding at the tricky dynamics in getting immigration legislation passed.

Indeed, the coalition is taking pains to limit its scope to urging a permanent legislative solution for DACA recipients, rather than diving into the broader immigration debate. They are also making sure to advocate for a federal Dream Act, in part, in economic terms.

“Not only is providing these hard-working individuals with a permanent legal status the right thing to do, it is also in the state’s and the nation’s best economic interest,” said **Eddie Alderete**, senior vice president of Laredo-based IBC Bank.

**Woody Hunt**, an El Paso developer and GOP donor, echoed that point.

“We employ Dreamers,” he said at the virtual news conference. “We have seen them start their own businesses

and strengthen others. We see firsthand the way their contributions in taxes and talent help our state economy grow.”

In Washington, Cornyn’s involvement spotlights the state of play.

Since the mid-2000s, the Republican has voted against some versions of the Dream Act, most recently in 2018. But he’s also voted for other versions, including one in 2018 that would’ve provided those “Dreamers” a pathway to citizenship in exchange for border wall funding.

Up for reelection last year, Cornyn ran a Spanish-language ad that told Texas voters he “strongly supports the legalization of Dreamers,” whose families either crossed the border unlawfully or overstayed visas.

He also told the editorial board of the Austin American Statesman last fall that he had encouraged Jared Kushner, former President Donald Trump’s son-in-law and senior adviser, to ask congressional leaders to “take up and pass a standalone bill that would provide protection for the Dreamers.”

Asked on Tuesday if Cornyn currently supports a standalone DACA bill, an aide pointed to comments the senator made last summer on the Senate floor. In that speech, Cornyn said only that “DACA recipients must have a permanent legislative solution.”

The Texan’s approach has irritated some immigrant advocates, who accuse him of hypocrisy.

“Cornyn has mastered the art of pretending to be somewhat moderate, because of the way he speaks, because of the way he looks, because of the way he comes off,” Frank Sharry of America’s Voice said last year, calling the Republican “insincere.”

The senator’s viewpoint, though, has also put him at odds with some of his fellow Republicans, particularly since Trump sought to end the DACA program.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, a Republican, has launched legal efforts aimed at dissolving DACA, which Obama established via executive action. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, also a Republican, has often assailed efforts like the Dream Act as “amnesty.”

Those cross-currents aren’t lost on the Texas Opportunity Coalition.

Karl Rove, a GOP strategist and longtime adviser to former George W. Bush, on Tuesday joined in the coalition’s

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launch. He said he recognizes that “there are a lot of people in my party who don’t share my views.” But he added that a permanent solution is still the “right thing to do.”

“It would be a blot on our country’s soul if we were to take hundreds of thousands of people who’ve known no country but America and tell them to get lost,” he said, adding that it would be “politically smart for both parties” to secure permanent legal status for “Dreamers.”

Coalition members plan to make their case to individual lawmakers, with Juan Carlos Cerda of the Texas Business Immigration Coalition telling Cornyn and other Texans in Congress that “we are counting on you to pass the Dream Act and make it a reality in 2021.”

While Biden has already unveiled an expansive immigration proposal, it faces long odds in garnering sufficient votes for passage, leaving the pathway forward unclear.

“Hopefully, we can learn from the lessons of the past and begin working on smaller packages that can gain broad bipartisan support and hopefully build trust in the process,” Cornyn said.