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WITH JOHN CORNYN'S SUPPORT, NEW TEXAS COALITION FORMS TO PUSH FOR CONGRESSIONAL FIX FOR "DREAMERS"

By Patrick Svitek
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With the support of U.S. Sen. John Cornyn — and the arrival of a Democratic president — a new Texas business coalition is launching to advocate for a permanent legislative solution for young people whose parents brought them illegally to the United States as children.

In addition to the state's senior senator, the Texas Opportunity Coalition includes nearly three dozen chambers of commerce, other economic development groups and institutions of higher learning. They believe the moment is ripe in Washington, D.C., to end the yearslong uncertainty — prompted by executive action — and pass a federal "DREAM Act" that would give permanent legal status to those known as "Dreamers."

"Clearly the tone has changed, and as you know, President Biden laid out a comprehensive immigration reform [agenda] on day one," said **Woody Hunt**, an El Paso developer and major Republican donor who is part of the coalition. "But I think the more practical implication is that you know that you're gonna get a vote in the Senate, which might've not been the case previously."

The coalition is being anchored by the **Texas Business Leadership Council** and the Texas Business Immigration Coalition. It is set to be announced at a virtual event Tuesday morning featuring Cornyn and **Hunt**, as well as Karl Rove, the veteran Republican strategist; **Justin Yancy**, president of the **TBLC**; Rebecca Shi, executive director of the American Business Immigration Coalition; and **Eddie Aldrete**, senior vice president of IBC Bank.

The coalition has a key congressional ally in Cornyn, who has been focused on finding a solution for the narrower group of young immigrants who benefitted from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. That initiative, which former President Barack Obama announced in 2012, gave certain Dreamers renewable, two-year work permits and protected them from deportation. Obama's successor, Donald Trump, announced in 2017 that he was phasing out DACA, but the U.S. Supreme Court stepped in last year to save the program.

About 106,000 DACA recipients lived in Texas as of March 2020, and another 86,000 were possibly eligible to apply, according to the Migration Policy Institute

"Dreamers in Texas — they've certainly, the last four years, have just been provided a lot of instability and uncertainty,

and so we're taking the position from an employers' perspective," **Yancy** said. "There's the same uncertainty, instability, for a critical part of our workforce."

The coalition includes the chambers of commerce in some of the state's biggest cities — like Austin, El Paso and Fort Worth — as well as several universities, such as the University of North Texas and the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Cornyn has long voiced support for providing a more stable future for the group of young immigrants and voted for it on some occasions. Cornyn said in a Dallas TV interview Sunday he was ready to work with the Biden administration on immigration and that he has "made it pretty clear ... that I think we ought to start with the DACA issue because that's where I think the greatest consensus lies."

"I'm ready to act on that and come up with a stable future for these young people who've done nothing — they came as children — and I think that's a good place to start," Cornyn told KXAS-TV's "Lone Star Politics."

Cornyn is coming off a 2020 reelection bid during which he campaigned on his support for Dreamers, including in one Spanish-language TV ad that said he "strongly supports the legalization of Dreamers." Democrats and immigration reform advocates say he has a trail of votes that call into question how sincerely he supports legalization. Cornyn has said his thinking on how to approach that group has evolved and he now supports dealing with it on a standalone basis.

Opinion on the issue is somewhat divided in the Republican Party, with some DACA opponents arguing that programs to allow the group to stay in the country incentivize illegal immigration. Those opponents include the state's other U.S. senator, Ted Cruz, who has denounced legislative efforts to help DACA recipients as "amnesty."

Coalition leaders stressed they are narrowly focused on Dreamers and not interested in other, more politically charged immigration issues. **Yancy** said the group's "biggest obstacle is to continue to have to explain what this is not."

"This is not about the pluses or minus of a border wall, this is not about border security, this is not about caps on visas or protective status," **Yancy** said. "This is about what it's about: It's permanent legal status for Dreamers. Period."

The Senate on Tuesday is set to confirm Biden's nominee to lead the Department of Homeland Security, Alejandro Mayorkas, despite a push by Cornyn and several other GOP senators to slow down the process by holding an additional hearing with him.