



The Daily Dish

Immigration, Again

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | JUNE 18, 2024

Today President Biden is [expected](#) to announce a new immigration initiative that would provide a path to citizenship for immigrants who are married to U.S. citizens but entered the country illegally. According to the coverage, the program will be beneficial for those who have been in the United States for over 10 years. It would provide work permits, deportation protection, and – the path to citizenship – a way to apply for a green card.

What should one think of this? On the one hand, it is election-year politics. The initiative will be announced at a White House celebration commemorating 12 years of DACA – Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. It affects a bit over 1 million individuals but, as *The New York Times* noted while [previewing](#) the program a week ago, it “would have a particularly big impact in swing states, including Nevada, Arizona and Georgia.” This program and the DACA celebration are intended to politically offset the president’s recent crackdown ([empty](#) as it is) on asylum-seeking immigrants.

There is, however, a big difference between DACA and today’s action. DACA rests on any administration’s latitude in setting enforcement priorities. With DACA, the Obama Administration simply said that DACA-eligible “Dreamers” would be placed on the lowest rung of immigration enforcement and, as a result, be allowed to remain in the United States. But DACA recipients, who could work and were safe from deportation, were not legalized.

President Biden intends to give these spouses legal status by granting them “parole in place,” which was previously applied in two [cases involving the military](#). This waives the current-law requirement that the spouses return to their country of origin for 10 years before they can apply for a green card. Congress explicitly included this provision in law to reduce incentives to immigrate illegally (and marry). In this classically Biden-esque way, today’s announcement is a nonchalant ripping up of the law for his political purposes.

The right thing to do, of course, is to [introduce legislation](#) to achieve the same purpose. Indeed, the action is another piece of evidence that the existing legal immigration framework is fundamentally broken. But legislating is the kind of hard work that this administration appears uninterested in pursuing. Genuine, needed immigration reform remains a bridge too far.