

# President Trump's Four Pillars for Immigration Reform

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In his first State of the Union address on Tuesday January 30, 2018, President Donald Trump highlighted his plan for immigration reform, which consists of four pillars: (1) creating a path to citizenship for DREAMers, (2) securing the border, (3) eliminating the diversity visa lottery, and (4) limiting family-based immigration. The immigration debate has become a prominent component of the broader budget negotiations playing out in Congress, with relief for DREAMers under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program being pitted against funding for a wall and other border security measures. The president's aims to eliminate the diversity visa lottery and restrict the family members who would be eligible for family-based immigration are consistent with the themes previously espoused by the administration. However, such changes would require legislation to be enacted. Until and unless such legislation is passed, those visa categories remain in effect under U.S. law.

## 1. Path to Citizenship for DREAMers

Beginning in 2012, under the Obama administration, the DACA program authorized the issuance of work permits for undocumented immigrants who were brought to the

United States as children. These DACA recipients, as well as DACA-eligible individuals, are commonly referred to as “DREAMers.” As of September of 2017, nearly 700,000 immigrants were enrolled in DACA out of the approximately 1.8 million DREAMers estimated to be residing in the United States. On September 5, 2017, President Trump announced [the rescission of the DACA program](#). However, on January 9, 2018, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued an injunction against the DACA rescission. The administration has appealed that decision. In the meantime, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has resumed its handling of DACA renewals. [Softening his position on DACA](#) in an effort to reach a bipartisan deal on immigration reform, President Trump publicly declared his support for DREAMers who meet certain education and work requirements and demonstrate good moral character to acquire U.S. citizenship over a period of 10-12 years.

## **2. Border Security**

The second pillar of the president’s immigration reform proposal includes \$25 billion of funding to (1) secure the northern and southern borders of the United States, including constructing a southern border wall; (2) increase personnel responsible for immigration enforcement (including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers, and immigration judges); and (3) further implement the use of technology such as cameras, sensors, and drones to combat illegal immigration. Homeland Security officials believe that the insufficient number of border patrol personnel is a key challenge to maintaining border security. Accordingly, President Trump’s framework includes “hiring and pay reforms to ensure the recruitment and retention of critically-needed personnel.”

## **3. An End to the Diversity Visa Lottery**

President Trump’s third pillar seeks to end the diversity visa lottery in favor of a merit-based immigration system. The president has repeatedly criticized the diversity visa lottery program for issuing green cards without any regard for skill or merit. At his State of the Union address, President Trump cited the recent terrorist attack in New York City in which a foreign national who acquired his green card through the visa lottery drove a truck on a crowded bike path and killed eight people. The White House proposal advocates the reallocation of diversity visas to reduce the backlogs for other immigrant visa categories, such as high-skilled employment-based visas.

## **4. Restrictions on Family-Based Immigration**

Finally, the fourth pillar of President Trump’s proposed immigration reform seeks to limit family-based immigration to include only spouses and minor children. By contrast, under current immigration law, sponsorship can be extended to spouses and minor children, as well as parents, siblings, fiancées, and children over the age of 21. At the State of the Union address, in an effort to also link this type of immigration sponsorship to the risks posed by terrorism, the president alluded to another recent terrorist attack involving a pipe bomb detonated in a Manhattan subway, which was perpetrated by a foreign national who entered the U.S. through visa sponsorship as an extended family member.

Now that President Trump has unveiled his proposal for immigration reform, it will be up to Congress to reach agreement on an immigration reform package that best serves the national interest.

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