

THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR DREAMERS

By [Justin Yancy](#)

Texas CEO Magazine
September 21, 2021

Over the past 20 years I have worked with employers to make Texas the most competitive, business-friendly state in the country. As the president of the [Texas Business Leadership Council](#), it has been my honor to collaborate with executives around the state on policies and practices that keep our economy growing.

I'm happy to say, it's been a very successful two decades for our state's economy. Texas's GDP is two and a half times the size it was in 2001, our population is at an all-time high, and so many people are relocating to enjoy what we've built here that we're set to get two new representatives in the US Congress, while other states are losing representation.

Of course, we still face many challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted supply chains and forced many small businesses to shutter their doors. Fluctuations in the oil and gas markets continue to have an oversized impact on our economy, as do changes to import/export protocols. Businesses of all sizes encounter serious and escalating issues with cybersecurity, climate events, and even finding employees.

These concerns are all critically important. But there is one more issue to add to the list of what we must get right if we are to continue to prosper: immigration. I am working through both the [Texas Business Leadership Council](#) and the Texas Opportunity Coalition to advance bipartisan federal legislation that will allow Dreamers— young undocumented men and women brought to this country as children—to stay in the United States. That includes allowing the 213,000 Dreamers who call Texas home to continue to work, go to school, raise families, and support their communities here in our state.

A federal DREAM Act—bipartisan versions of which have been introduced in the US House and Senate—would end years of uncertainty for Dreamers, many of whom know no other home than the United States. It would also end uncertainty for the employers who have already hired them, trained them, and invested in their growth, and who rely on their talent to see their businesses flourish.

The reason that I, along with hundreds of Texas leaders representing businesses, chambers of commerce, and university systems, have chosen to show a united front on this issue is because it's the smart and economically sound thing to do.

Currently, 96 percent of Dreamers are either working or enrolled in school. Dreamers are woven into every thread of our lives. Many are teachers, doctors, and nurses. They have been on the front lines over the past 18 months, putting their lives—and their families' lives—on the line for their fellow Texans, sacrificing for a country that continues to let them live in limbo.

The fact is, Dreamers are a substantial part of the economic engine of our state. They are more likely to start new businesses and hire other workers—nearly 8,500 Texas Dreamers are entrepreneurs.

The economic data says it all.

Every year, Dreamers in the Lone Star State contribute \$6 billion in GDP to the Texas economy, wielding a spending power of more than \$3 billion. That's money that keeps businesses afloat, that keeps our housing market strong, that helps build our tax base. Speaking of taxes, Dreamers also pay hundreds of millions in both federal and state and local taxes, money that we use to support our roads, schools, and critical infrastructure.

It makes no sense to spend resources educating someone and onboarding them only to ship that talent overseas because of something that wasn't their fault to begin with. They should be given the opportunity to contribute to the state that invested in them, and the opportunity to adjust their status down the road.

One only needs to look at the members of our Texas Opportunity Coalition to see that fixing DACA is a business issue that brings diverse Texans together. Our coalition partners come from different fields, from the public and private sector, from small and large enterprises. And they come from across the political spectrum.

Wanting an immigration system that aligns with our economic needs shouldn't be a political football, or even a controversial issue. We are spending too much time talking about what an idealized immigration system could look like without dealing squarely with the reality of the situation that we have.

And when it comes to Dreamers, what we have is remarkable: Hundreds of thousands of talented young people across the country who are committed to its future success. We don't just owe it to Dreamers to give them a chance. We owe it to ourselves.