

# Opinion How the Tillis-Sinema immigration bill would right two glaring wrongs



By [George F. Will](#)

Columnist | [+ Follow](#)

December 11, 2022 at 7:00 a.m. EST

Lame-duck sessions of Congress are often regarded with an indifference befitting an afterthought, the tidying up of mostly minor matters. The current session, however, could begin rehabilitating the government's reputation by, with a single bipartisan stroke, righting two glaring wrongs that large American majorities recognize as such. They are the insecure southern border. And the decades-long callousness toward those called "dreamers."

The 2 million of them were under age 16 when brought here by parents who were not lawfully here. They have lived under threat of deportation from the only country they have known, their insecurity underscored by their exclusion from federal and state privileges to which they would have access if, having been born here, they were citizens.

President Barack Obama's morally admirable but constitutionally dubious 2012 fiat (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) gave dreamers temporary but renewable legal status and work authorization. President Donald Trump rescinded DACA in 2017, calling it executive overreach, something he understood from indulging in it. Now, however, two senators, Thom Tillis (R-N.C.) and Kyrsten Sinema (I-Ariz.), propose legislation providing, inter alia, tens of billions of dollars for enhanced border security, and for prompt processing of asylum requests (most of which are denied). And, for dreamers, a 10-year — hardly hurried — path to citizenship.

Two impediments to enacting the Tillis-Sinema bill are: those who, ignoring the axiom that the perfect is the enemy of the good, will settle for nothing less than a "comprehensive" solution to all immigration complexities. (The 2013 comprehensive bill was 1,197 pages, and short-lived.) And those who want no solutions, preferring to tickle political advantage from endless border turmoil.



For many impiders, one word, “amnesty” — less a thought than an evasion of thinking — suffices to paralyze immigration policy. Incessantly shrieked, this word sends legislators stampeding away from providing to America’s very approximately 11 million unauthorized immigrants (almost as numerous as Ohioans) something that is in the national interest: a path to citizenship. About two-thirds of them have been here for more than a decade; more than a fifth for at least 20 years. They are not going home; they are home. Besides, America’s reservoir of decency is too deep to tolerate the police measures that would be necessary to rip these people — in many cases, these neighbors — from the social fabric.

Dreamers, having known no home other than America, will remain hostages to other people’s agendas unless the Tillis-Sinema measure liberates them by rejecting the chimera of everything-at-once immigration reform. In a reasonable time and place, this bill could wait until January. But in the policy bazaar by which House Republicans are extorting promises from Rep. Kevin McCarthy in exchange for making him House speaker, he has said he will not bring up immigration legislation in the next two years. And never until the border is secure.

The latter means until Fox News’s green rooms are emptied of those fungible anti-immigration hysterics whose real grievance is with Ronald Reagan’s farewell address: He had always imagined America as “a tall, proud city” and “if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors, and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.”

Immigrants poured through the doors to build the nation. In his just-published “Indivisible: Daniel Webster and the Birth of American Nationalism,” law professor Joel Richard Paul writes that the nation’s first economic crisis, the Panic of 1819, caused 20 percent unemployment: “That the economy grew at all was remarkable. The principle source of economic growth was the flow of hungry immigrants brimming with audacious ambitions. As usual in America, it was the new Americans who kept the economy moving forward.”

Most Americans understand that dreamers are de facto Americans, and not new ones. So, there is no political risk in at last bringing them into full-fledged civic equality with all of us who are (in the words of George Washington’s farewell address) “citizens by birth *or choice* of a common country” (emphasis added).

When seeking the Republicans’ 1988 presidential nomination, Delaware Gov. Pete du Pont, who is high on the list of splendid presidents the electorate chose not to have, spoke of “Damn right!” policies — commonsensical but neglected stances. Today, large majorities endorse two propositions: Secure borders, a core component of national sovereignty, require a substantial and immediate infusion of resources. And the treatment of the dreamers has been unworthy of the nation that is already benefiting from their unreciprocated loyalty. So, regarding the Tillis-Sinema measure, Congress should say: “Damn right!”