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ONE MORE IMMIGRATION TRY

A debate and vote might save imperiled House Republicans.

By The Editorial Board
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Courts this year have deferred the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, but the issue will return soon enough. So bravo to 19 Republicans who have signed a discharge petition to debate a fix for the so-called Dreamers, which would be an instructive exercise.

Many Republicans want to duck a vote on immigration that divides the party. And there's no urgency since federal courts have ordered the Trump Administration to renew DACA work permits while they consider the legality of President Trump's 2017 decision to end the program.

But the issue of what to do with the 800,000 or so young adults who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children, many of whom have no memory of their home country, isn't going away. These Dreamers remain in legal limbo, and Democrats will use them as a cudgel against Republicans in the fall.

House Judiciary Chairman Bob Goodlatte has introduced legislation to legalize Dreamers. But the bill is riddled with poison pills including an e-Verify mandate for employers, self-deportation of undocumented farm workers and stringent limits on family-based immigration. This would effectively force Republicans to choose between legalizing Dreamers and selling out employers.

This is why Republicans in competitive districts with large Hispanic populations are supporting a "Queen of the Hill" rule that would set up four immigration votes on the House floor. The bill with the most votes that passes would go to the Senate. Democrats could offer a bill that only legalizes Dreamers. The bipartisan USA Act, which pairs border security provisions with legal status, would be debated. Mr. Goodlatte would get a vote on his bill, and House leaders would offer their own.

It's unlikely that the Democratic or Goodlatte bills would command a majority. But the USA Act, which has 59 cosponsors including 29 Republicans, stands a chance. Paul Ryan and Kevin McCarthy might also offer a bill that wins the support of most Republicans and perhaps some moderate Democrats.

House Republicans would show they're sincere about solving the DACA problem, and voting would give vulnerable Members some inoculation against liberal attacks. This could be the difference between winning or losing for Carlos Curbelo (Florida), John Faso (New York), Mike Coffman (Colorado), Mark Amodei (Nevada) and Steve Knight (California).

House leaders are reluctant to give up control of the floor, and they don't want to ask Members to vote on controversial bills that President Trump might not sign. But the worst scenario is that no bill gets a majority, in which case Members still get to show voters where

they stand. In the best case, the Senate would pass its own bill, and the two chambers would go to conference where the White House could work out a signable compromise.

If Republicans lose the House, they will have less influence when courts eventually rule on DACA. And if the courts let DACA stand as is, Republicans will have lost a bargaining chip for other immigration priorities.

One hundred and ninety-six Democrats have backed the Queen of the Hill resolution. So assuming every Democrat signs the discharge petition, six more Republicans would need to join. A vigorous floor debate would empower a Congressional majority, rather than a minority of the GOP majority.