

Miami Herald

Business leaders want politicians to stop fighting over wall and make this deal

BY JIMENA TAVEL

JANUARY 16, 2019 08:10 PM, UPDATED 1 HOUR 56 MINUTES AGO

As the longest government shutdown in American history nears its fourth week, a group of business leaders from across the nation met in Miami to discuss a bipartisan solution for immigration reform and possibly ending the impasse.

Representatives of the [American Business Immigration Coalition](#), a nationwide group of advocates for immigrant rights, gathered for a two-day retreat Tuesday and Wednesday. The coalition leaders spoke to Miami Dade College students, many of whom are immigrants or recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, program.

They talked with Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Miami., on Tuesday.

The business heads called on politicians to make a deal. They want Democrats to approve funding for President Donald Trump's wall in exchange for people under the DACA and Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, to gain permanent legal status.

"This is a win-win solution," said William C. Kunkler III, a coalition leader from Illinois. "All we're asking is for our elected officials to do their job. As business people, we want to get things done."

Although the leaders list building a better immigration system as a long-term goal of their coalition, they don't believe Trump's wall is a solution. They believe

Miami Herald

the term “wall,” in fact, is divisive. But they do think Democrats should give Trump \$5.7 billion for the wall — as long as they get DACA and TPS in return.

In 2017, Trump terminated DACA, the Obama program that allowed children who were brought to this country by their illegal immigrant parents a chance to stay here lawfully. [The matter is now before the courts.](#)

The Department of Homeland Security has tried to terminate TPS for thousands of immigrants who have been able to live and work legally in the United States, often for decades, due to hardships in their countries. The proposed termination primarily would affect those who have come from the Caribbean, Central America and some African countries. [The courts are reviewing the issue.](#)

Mike Fernandez, a Cuban American billionaire healthcare executive who is one of the coalition leaders, said he sees the dreamers and the TPS beneficiaries as people who have their backs to the wall in front of a firing squad. He wants to focus on helping them, even if that means giving Trump money for the wall.

“So be it,” said Fernandez, [a Republican mega-donor who left the party](#) after Donald Trump was elected president in 2016.

Miami Herald



Mike Fernandez, a Cuban American billionaire healthcare executive from Miami, wants Democrats to give President Donald Trump the money for the wall in exchange for a legal pathway for DACA and TPS recipients.

Tom Hudson *WLRN file photo*

Fernandez said the coalition leaders don't believe the Southern border is going through a crisis, as Trump has insisted. Instead, he said the shutdown is causing far more serious consequences in airports. Having TSA employees call in sick is "dangerous" and opens a window for a terrorist to possibly get through, he said.

"All it takes is one incident, and we're going to be sorry that we've acted this way," Fernandez said.

Kunkler said from an economic viewpoint, the United States needs a good relationship with Mexico to transport goods back and forth easily. He also said

Miami Herald

immigrants bring new cultures to organizations and improve the workflow of businesses.

Fernandez said immigrants are fulfilling jobs in the U.S. that others aren't willing to do, and they are also one of the largest sources of business entrepreneurs.

It's also dangerous, Fernandez said, to keep the shutdown in place.

"They're putting brakes on the economy [and] we'll go diving into a recession," Fernandez said. "Both parties need to come to the table now."



Demonstrators organized by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association rally against the government shutdown in Washington, D.C., Jan. 10, 2019. ERIN SCHAFF/NYT