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Thank You, Senator Capito, For Fighting For All West Virginians

The debate over America's need for a strong Southern border and solution for our nation's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program recipients and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders has become a political circus. West Virginians and Americans demand action. This political stonewalling in our nation's capital cannot continue.

Fortunately, we have one of America's best advocates representing our interests in Washington, Senator Shelley Moore Capito.

Senator Capito has been tasked with negotiating a deal between Republicans and Democrats by taking a seat on the coveted bipartisan conference committee. This committee has until February 15th to create a proposal to fund the government beyond this deadline. Their proposal must include a solution that enhances border security and finds a long-term legislative solution for "Dreamers"— young immigrants who were brought illegally into the country by their parents and through no fault of their own— and TPS holders – who fled their home countries due to natural disasters or war, but whose nearly three-decades old protections have been terminated. These are both talented groups of people who are contributing to our state and country. They deserve the opportunity to find a proper path to citizenship.

West Virginia, just like most of America, is home to a powerful immigrant population. Our more than 30,000 immigrant residents hold a spending power of nearly \$700 million. Immigrants in our state fill critical shortages in everything from high-tech fields and academia to agriculture, hospitality and service industries. Our state also hosts more than 1,400 immigrant entrepreneurs and our state's immigrants paid more than \$263 million in taxes in 2014 alone. There is no denying the impact these folks have on our state.

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One of the most important roles of the government is to ensure the health and safety of its citizenry. There are many West Virginian's who have been waiting for an answer to the drug crisis in our communities. Just last week, border patrol agents seized the largest shipment of fentanyl in the history of the United States of America, weighing-in at 254 pounds; enough to kill 50 million Americans. Americans and West Virginians alike need to be provided with enhanced border security, providing us with safety and peace of mind that resources are being properly allocated so that harmful narcotics are being barred entry to our country. Let me be clear, this is not the silver bullet to the drug epidemic ravaging our communities, but it is one piece of the puzzle to solving the largest crisis currently facing our state.

Regardless of where you land on the issue, Dreamers, TPS holders and Senator Capito need our support. President Trump has shown a willingness to compromise and work in a bipartisan manner to ensure strong border security. Any solution to enhance border security and fund our government must also include permanent protections for Dreamers and TPS holders. While it's important that we keep criminals and drug cartels out of West Virginia communities, it's also important that we support the immigrants who *are* making a difference and have been contributing to our communities for many years.

I urge Senator Capito to continue the good fight and find a bipartisan solution that enhances border security and provides permanent protections to Dreamers and TPS holders.

Kent A. Leonhardt
West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials who sits on the Board of Public Works.

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