

So Others Can Dream

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The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act of 2007 is an important bill Congress must pass. This bill enables underprivileged immigrant students to obtain temporary, and eventually permanent, legal status in America, where they can live, learn, and function as contributing members of society. Not only will these immigrant children legally live in America, but they will also be eligible for citizenship if they had previously either gone to college or served in the United States military. A symbiotic relationship would then be established between the young immigrants and the U.S. government and economy. The young immigrants will receive educations and also become legal residents. The economy would be aided in several different ways, including the presence of both a larger educated workforce and increased income, which would result in a positive fiscal effect on our economy. In addition, the government would be supported by the new tax dollars and possible military service from the immigrants. There are two major benefits to the DREAM Act of 2007: the positive impact on the life of the immigrants; and the positive impact on the U.S. government and economy.

There are millions of illegal immigrants in America today. Many thousand cross the U.S.-Mexico border each year. According to Wikipedia, the crossing can be very treacherous, particularly because of dehydration, frostbite, heatstroke, and exhaustion.¹ Despite this fact, millions of immigrants do enter the country each year. In fact, according to the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), the Census Bureau estimated that there were 7 million undocumented aliens living in the U.S. in 2000.² Furthermore, that number is estimated to be steadily increasing at about 500,000 per year.² That easily puts the 2008 total at over 10 million aliens. Many of them occupy low-paying jobs, such

as lawn care, landscaping, construction work, farm work, housecleaning, babysitting, and other strenuous occupations. Most immigrants are not insured, and they work in high-risk, dangerous, and unstable positions.

The DREAM Act of 2007 is a bill which will enable the children of the undocumented immigrants to secure a safe and stable life. This bipartisan legislation would present an opportunity for the children of the immigrants to obtain citizenship, go to school, and receive in-state tuition at state colleges. According to the National Immigration Law Center (NILC), in order to qualify for legal residency, the applicant must be "...age 15 or younger at least 5 years before the date of the bill's enactment."³ Applicants would be excluded if "...they have committed crimes, are a security risk...or [are] removable on certain other grounds."³ Also, if the immigrant took any lengthy trips outside the borders of the U.S. during his or her temporary resident status, he or she would be disqualified from any of the benefits under the DREAM Act. If the immigrant child satisfied all terms of eligibility, he or she would be awarded conditional permanent resident status, which would last for six years. During that six-year period, the applicant would have to complete one of the following: graduate from a two-year college; study for two years at a four-year college institution; or serve for two years in the U.S. armed forces.³ Completion of one of these terms would qualify the immigrant for unrestricted lawful permanent resident status. In addition, the NILC states that the DREAM Act would remove a penalty to state colleges for "providing in-state tuition or other higher education benefits without regard to immigration status."³

If passed, the DREAM Act of 2007 will improve the lives of many young immigrants. This bill provides a unique opportunity for many qualifying students with

good moral character. Education is the foundation of knowledge and a satisfying life. The opportunities for education and permanent resident status in the DREAM Act are clearly useful to new immigrants because with the knowledge they would gain, they would be capable of beginning very successful lives. But if education is denied to these young people, America deprives them of one the most fundamental sentiments of American life: the pursuit of happiness. With the passage of the DREAM act, underprivileged immigrant students will have the same opportunities as those given to other American students.

For example, Ronald Reagan's amnesty program of 1986 helped many immigrants attain equal opportunities and live in society as normal American citizens. Reyna Grande is one such person. A personal account of this female immigrant who has been very successful in her life in the U.S. shows that equal opportunities are essential to an immigrant's success. Reyna Grande is a young Mexican-American author who benefited under Ronald Reagan's amnesty program.⁴ This bill reformed America's immigration policy and offered amnesty to all undocumented aliens who had continuously lived in the U.S. prior to January 1, 1982. In a recent speech to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy Corps of Cadets, Grande emphasized two major opportunities that helped her become successful.⁵ First, she benefited under the provisions in Reagan's amnesty program. Second, she stated that her father stressed education, which has been necessary for her success.⁵ Because of the opportunities for education presented to her in the amnesty bill, Grande had the rare chance to attend college.⁵ By doing so, she attained an upper-level education and is a prestigious author today. The DREAM Act of 2007 would do for thousands of immigrants today what Reagan's bill did for Reyna

Grande back in 1986. It will give these immigrants opportunities to learn, live, and function equally in our modern society. Americans cannot humanely deny education to these hard-working immigrants in our communities. It is imperative that they have the same opportunities so that they, too, have the same chance for success in the world as their U.S. citizen counterparts.

Grande also stated that many immigrants come to America without their children, but eventually bring the children because of the superior schools in America.⁴ Her own parents came here by themselves and after gathering some money, brought all their children here to America. This tragic separation of families usually occurs for one of two main reasons.

- They lack sufficient funds to pay for their children's passage to America. This is because many of the immigrants did not occupy well-paying jobs in their original countries. They may barely have enough to secure their own passage.⁴
- Once they arrive here, they cannot hope initially to support their family in America. The cost of living in the U.S. is rather high and is rising each year. A new immigrant simply cannot support a family off his or her typically meager pay.⁴

Despite this fact, thousands of immigrant children do come into the U.S. each year.

There is much evidence of the presence of immigrant children in America's local schools and hospitals. It is important that they receive the care and opportunities that they deserve.

The DREAM Act of 2007 would in effect give hope to immigrant children for the opportunity to pursue stable, safe lives. Also, the DREAM Act would remove a federal provision which penalizes states that provide in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants attending college. This bill will touch the lives of many immigrants; it would change their lives and start them on a new, more promising path to success. New opportunities, such as citizenship eligibility, will also become a reality for many of these young, undocumented immigrants.

Alongside the benefits for the immigrants themselves, there are economic benefits for the U.S. as well. The new legal workforce present when the immigrants become well-educated and attain jobs would be very large. This surge of workers could vitalize America's economy by raising gross domestic product (GDP). These workers could aspire to assimilate into the middle class. Over time, they would build the economy and support the country with their spending and investing. With all of the new opportunities offered to them in the DREAM Act, many would attend college and achieve great positions, such as company executives, scientists, and other leaders of modern society.

Concern for the welfare of the U.S. economy abounds in today's market. Many economic advisors are constantly monitoring the course of the economy. Under the DREAM Act, a large, legal, and eager workforce is formed. The new immigrants would help to create a more aggressive economy. If that were to occur, then America would be on its way to further advancing its economy in the world market. In short, this new workforce created by the legislation in the DREAM Act could serve as a catalyst in the strong, steadily-growing U.S. economy.

Immigration takes much of the government's resources. In fact, the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) states that the National Research Council estimates that America spends somewhere between \$11 billion and \$22 billion on immigrants each year.⁶ But the NILC says that if one extrapolates the total net tax collected from the legal immigrants and the money spent in the U.S. market each year by all of the immigrants, both of which support the government and the economy, it is easy to see that over a number of years each immigrant would fully reimburse the federal government for his or her individual costs.⁷ The U.S. government would also be tremendously aided by the new legal immigrants because the DREAM Act stipulates that all potential beneficiaries devote at least two years to either the U.S. military or to a college of some kind. If the immigrant chose the military, the government would directly be aided by his or her service. If the immigrant went to college, he or she would also aid the government indirectly. Common statistics show that college graduates usually earn more money than high school graduates. Therefore, immigrants with college degrees would also more strongly support the U.S. government through their paying of higher taxes.

In addition to the governmental benefits, there will be economic benefits as well. According to the NILC, as more immigrants attain higher-paying jobs, their collective spending and investing would both greatly benefit the U.S. economy.⁷ This is because of the large numbers of immigrants that would become higher-spending consumers as a result of the DREAM Act legislation.⁷ The economy will literally explode with growth, and hundreds of billions of dollars would be spent in the U.S. market.⁷ Although spending and investing are very significant economic benefits, a look at the economics of education shows promise as well. What initially seems to be a huge national problem can

easily be fixed by the DREAM Act.⁷ The numbers of foreign-born children in the U.S. has steadily increased since 1970, causing over-crowding in some schools.⁷ Because of an environment that is typically crowded and not conducive to learning in these schools, an alarming number of teenage immigrants drop out of high school each year. Statistics show that immigrant students are more likely to drop out of high school than non-immigrant students.⁷ The immigrant students are clearly at a disadvantage in the American school system.

This tragedy can be remedied by the legislation presented in the DREAM Act of 2007. According to the NILC, there are several provisions in the bill that aid these immigrant minors and decrease the American high school immigrant dropout rate.⁷ One benefit that the NILC mentions is that the legislation in the DREAM Act would provide a substantial incentive for struggling immigrant students to graduate.⁷ The status of an individual immigrant also plays a large role in his or her success. Students who are not legally living in America tend to struggle more with their educations than students with temporary or permanent legal resident status.⁷ The DREAM Act would eliminate the barriers that restrain the immigrants from succeeding in their educations, thus enabling the students to excel. NILC records also show that the average immigrant who drops out of high school costs the federal government more in criminal expenses each year than an immigrant who graduates from either high school or college.⁷ So another benefit of the bill is shown in the fact that it would reduce the amount of crime in America, thereby saving the government thousands of dollars.

An important part of the DREAM Act legislation is that all immigrants to be benefited by any of the legislation in the bill must have a clean criminal record and good

moral character. Immigrant criminals and other violators of the law simply would not be aided by this bill. In short, the DREAM Act promotes lawful behavior, good moral character, and discourages crime.

In spite of the obvious benefits to be derived from the DREAM Act, there are numerous opponents of this bill. The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), while supporting the DREAM Act, has been confronted with several major oppositions to this bill. Also, James J. Carafano, who regularly writes for the Heritage Foundation, is a major critic of this bill. Each opposing view, though, is clearly flawed and through an explanation, the true purpose of the bill is shown. The following opposing views are presented and rebutted below.

- “This bill would promote illegal immigration.”⁸

This is not true. This bill clearly says that any potential beneficiary would need to be *documented* and have consistently and legally resided in the U.S. for five years prior to being eligible for the benefits.⁸

- “U.S. taxpayers should not be...hurt by the costs of the legislation.”⁸

By the legislation under the DREAM Act, the immigrants would begin paying taxes as well. Thus, the financial weight of this bill would be evenly distributed across all Americans and the new immigrants.⁸

- “This bill would reward people who came here illegally.”⁸

The people who benefit from this bill are mostly minors. These children had no say in their coming here. This bill does not promote an incentive for adults to come here illegally. The main quality that this bill would reward is good moral character.⁸

- “The bill would place no limits on when individuals could apply.”⁹

This statement is partially flawed. There is, in fact, a time (or age) limit on when individuals can apply. As previously stated, the applicant must be 15 years old or younger at least five years prior to the activation of the bill. In reality, this bill benefits only the children of undocumented immigrants. So there actually is an age limit to qualify for the benefits under the bill.

- The bill would not restrict “...the number of persons who could apply. This would leave the program open to widespread abuse and rampant fraud.”⁹

Although there is no limit to the number people who can apply, if a limit were set, it would counter the point of the bill. The purpose of the DREAM Act is to help the thousands of immigrant children suffering from lack of educational opportunities in the U.S. Also, if the number of beneficiaries were limited, then the benefits derived from the DREAM Act, specifically reduced crime; promotion of good moral behavior; and the benefits to the U.S. government and economy would also be limited. Similarly, if a limit were set, discrimination would certainly occur because some immigrants would benefit and others would not. Therefore, it is logical that there must be no limit to the number of immigrant children beneficiaries.

The DREAM Act of 2007 is an effective and worthwhile bill because it will positively impact thousands of young immigrants' lives and it will greatly strengthen the U.S. government and economy. Many young immigrants in America will receive quality educations and live fulfilling lives as a result of the DREAM Act of 2007. Immigrants will be transformed from illegal aliens into recognized and accepted members of society. The economy will also be enhanced and expanded through increased investing and

spending in the American market. Also, a larger workforce will exist which can increase the average U.S. GDP and consequently increase the prosperity of the nation. As a result, the new taxpaying immigrants will help support the federal government. Also, through higher tax revenues, more tax dollars will be collected from the immigrants each year. It is also important to remember that citizenship will not be *guaranteed* to every applicant seeking the benefits of the bill. The immigrant must be of good moral character to qualify for any of the benefits included in the DREAM Act. Specifically, the beneficiary must have a clean criminal record; have lived in the U.S. for five years; and have devoted at least two years either to a college of some kind or to the U.S. military. The DREAM Act of 2007 will make a huge difference in millions of young immigrants' lives. It will give them hope, a route to success, and most importantly, a DREAM.

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