

ICE's Newest Trick: Deporting Valedictorians

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I've written about U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials' schoolyard antics before, but the recent news that ICE is planning to deport a California high school valedictorian just affirms my view that these immigration authorities need to get out of the schools. From the San Francisco Chronicle:

The valedictorian at Fresno's Bullard High School won't be attending college in the United States this fall because he's scheduled to be deported.

Seventeen-year-old Arthur Mkoyan's 4.0 grade-point average qualified him to enter one of the state's top universities. But he and his mother have been ordered back to Armenia after their last appeal for asylum failed. The family fled from what used to be part of the Soviet Union and has been seeking asylum since 1992.

But, rest assured, ICE shows its nice side once in a while (and if it's not clear, I'm being sarcastic here). As a sort of consolation prize, ICE decided to let Arthur stick around for graduation. According to the article, "A spokeswoman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement says they were given an extension until June 20 so Mkoyan could attend his graduation ceremony."

This past October, the Senate tried to help out students like Arthur, but to no avail. Legislation called the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act -- better known as the DREAM Act -- was introduced in the Senate, but failed a procedural vote. The legislation would have allowed Arthur and approximately 65,000 other undocumented students a path to citizenship and the opportunity for a college education. But unfortunately for Arthur, the legislation failed.

Arthur's story and that of the DREAM Act are just two examples of what amounts to an utterly inconsistent immigration policy. Whether ICE wants to admit it or not, undocumented immigrants are here to stay, and an enforcement-only policy that consists of random deportations just isn't going to cut it. According to a recently-released report by the Public Policy Institute of California, *Immigrant Pathways to Legal Permanent Residence: Now and Under a Merit-Based System*, more than half of the immigrants in California who have legal permanent resident status were at some point undocumented. This number is 42% for the U.S. as a whole. These immigrants -- both documented and undocumented -- are a vital part of the nation's economy and the fabric of our nation. Deporting smart students like Arthur -- especially considering that such a huge percentage of immigrants eventually receive legal status -- is not only bad for the immigrant community, but for the nation as a whole.

For a slightly happier immigration story, check out this video of DMI scholar and Mexican immigrant Samantha Contreras. Samantha was undocumented when she

graduated from high school, and soon realized the hardships associated with being undocumented.. "I learned the reality of my immigration status," she said. "I couldn't work, I couldn't go to college, I couldn't drive, I couldn't even get a Blockbuster membership card." Unlike Arthur's story, Samantha's has a happy ending -- an immigrant rights group helped her to enroll in college, and now she strives for a career in public policy.