

White House Blog

Opinion - The American DREAM

By Secretary Hilda Solis

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Early in my career, I worked as a student advisor and higher education recruitment counselor. Many of the young people I worked with were undocumented, including a college-bound young man whose academic achievements and dedication to hard work made him a model student in everyone's eyes. He gave everything his all, and today he's an environmental scientist. He has a rewarding, interesting and good-paying job. And he is making his own unique contribution to our country and the world.

He understood what a privilege it is to live in a country that allowed him to get a good education. That's precisely why he chose to give back through public service. It's his way of showing his profound gratitude.

I think about him every time I talk about the DREAM Act—legislation designed to stop punishing innocent young people for the actions of their parents, by giving them the chance to either obtain legal status by pursuing a higher education, or by serving in the U.S. armed forces.

The DREAM Act has long enjoyed bipartisan support. And the vote in the House of Representatives this week followed suit, with eight Republicans voting to pass the measure.

There's no reason why it shouldn't receive that kind of support in the Senate. It's time to act. Now.

The DREAM Act gives some of our nation's brightest students a fighting chance. It eliminates barriers to higher education that often result in high drop out rates. It provides powerful incentives to stay in school . . . and to graduate. The bottom line: workers with more education fare much better than workers with less.

The President has long been a strong supporter of the DREAM Act, and was a co-sponsor when he was in the Senate. I was an enthusiastic supporter when I served in Congress. And as Labor Secretary (often called "America's Job Counselor") I see important economic reasons to pass it. I've written numerous letters and made several calls to key members of Congress, urging

them to do the right thing and pass this bill. I've lifted my voice on this bill – both in English and Spanish – in radio, TV and print interviews spanning audiences all over the country.

As a proud daughter of immigrant parents, this issue hits home for me. But I'm not the only member of the Cabinet who supports the Dream Act.

My colleagues do too, for good reasons:

- * Defense Secretary Robert Gates has cited the rich precedent of non-citizens serving in the U.S. military;

- * Education Secretary Arne Duncan believes the DREAM Act will play an important part in the nation's efforts to have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020; and

- * Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano has stated that passing the DREAM Act would free up resources so that DHS can dedicate enforcement efforts to detaining and deporting criminals and those who pose a threat to our country.

- * And Commerce Secretary Gary Locke has mentioned that in the last 15 years, 25 % of venture capital-backed companies that eventually went public were started by immigrants; signaling the untapped potential of more than 700,000 young people in "citizenship limbo."

In short: the DREAM Act would strengthen our economy and our work force. It would strengthen our national defense and our national security. It's time to make this dream a reality.