

State of the Union's special guests: undocumented immigrants

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Several Congressmen and President Barack Obama have invited undocumented immigrants to the State of the Union in Washington D.C., as a reminder to President Obama and Congress that immigration reform isn't going away.

Alan Aleman, 20, is one of President Obama's and First Lady's special guests, according to the [Las Vegas Sun](#). He is one of the first undocumented immigrants in Nevada to receive a work permit under deferred action. He was brought by his parents from Mexico at age 11 and is studying biological science at the College of Southern Nevada. He has become well known about a month ago, when President Obama mentioned him by name in a speech to push for immigration reform.

"I have my driver's license now. I have my Social Security number now. I can apply for scholarships. So, I have more opportunities, and that's the thing I was waiting on for a long time," he told the [Las Vegas Sun in a recent interview](#).

Aleman will not be the only Dreamer to attend the State of the Union.

"I'm very very honored that Senator Warner invited me to this event," says Ambar Pinto, 19, of Fairfax County, Virginia. "I think it's going to make an impact in our country and show the importance that there is to have immigration reform in 2013."

Pinto says she received the invitation from Senator Mark R. Warner last Thursday, after he had read about her diligent community service in the [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#). She serves on the board of directors of [Edu-Futuro](#) — a non-profit which empowers Latino children, youth and families through education and leadership development, and she does so because she says she owes everything she is today to the organization, which helped her ever since she came to this country at age 12.

Today, she's a student studying international business at Northern Virginia Community College, where she says she pays up to \$2,500 per semester — three times more than her documented classmates who pay in-state tuition. She also can't drive without a driver's license.

"I want to start my own line of hotels and have a fashion boutique," says Pinto.

She says she knows she can achieve that, but by having citizenship status and being considered a citizen of the U.S., she would be able to contribute even more to the country.

"Her story reminds each of us that our commonwealth will become stronger when we create a responsible pathway to legal status for undocumented immigrants and their children," said

Senator Warner in a statement. “I was moved by her obvious love for this country, and by her willingness to work extra hard to have a shot at achieving the American dream.”

Pinto says she’s hoping for the president to have a concrete plan in place for comprehensive immigration reform, and for him to say, “It’s ready.” And if it’s not, she says she wants to ask him, “What are the issues preventing it?”

“That way I can bring this information back to my community and help him out,” says Pinto.

Julieta Garibay is 32, and also attending the State of the Union address by invitation from U.S. Representative Marc Veasey. She moved from Mexico to Austin, Texas with her parents when she was 12 years old.

She has her master’s in nursing from the University of Texas, but she’s unable to find work in nursing without papers. As a student, she co-founded the University Leadership Initiative, an undocumented youth organization that promotes higher education and civic engagement for immigrants, and she’s also a founding board member of the [United We DREAM Network](#).

Julieta Garibay on December 5, 2012 visiting the Newseum in Washington, DC. (Courtesy Julieta Garibay)

Although she’s active in her community, like Pinto, she says there are obstacles one faces being undocumented everyday.

“That’s why we’re all involved,” says Garibay. “We want to see a change...I would love to practice my nursing degree.”

She says although it’s still surreal to her that she will be attending the State of the Union to represent her and other immigrant families, she hopes President Obama doesn’t just reiterate words, but actually takes action.

She would like to ask him: “How can we uphold the American values of keeping our families together, and how can we make sure that it can be done in a timely manner?”

Gabino Sanchez, a South Carolina father of two U.S. citizen children, and husband, is currently fighting deportation, and will be Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez’ guest in the Capitol today.

Sanchez, 27, entered the country when he was 15 and, according to the office of Rep. Gutierrez, he has been working and providing for his family ever since. However, because he is undocumented, he has received multiple misdemeanor charges for driving without a license by local police over the past 10 years. Rep. Gutierrez has been helping Sanchez fight deportation since they first met in November 2011.

“I worry about being deported and separated from my children and wife, and my worry carries over to my family,” says Sanchez. “I want to fix my immigration problem for my family. So we

don't have to be afraid anymore...My seven-year-old asks when he would see me if I was to be sent to Mexico. This makes me sad.”

Rep. Gutierrez says Sanchez, his wife and his two U.S. citizen children represent all those in America who fear deportation, fear losing their kids, and hope that Congress actually fixes our immigration system this year.

“I am taking Gabino Sanchez to the president’s speech because he represents young people, the fathers and mothers and immediate families of U.S. citizens we deport every day,” he says. “Congress needs to know the cost of inaction.”

<http://nbclatino.com/2013/02/12/state-of-the-unions-special-guests-undocumented-immigrants/>