

POLITICS

The Conservative Case Against the DREAM Act

It's expensive, susceptible to fraud, and sends the wrong message

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In conservative blogging circles, the Democrat's proposed DREAM Act is causing quite a stir. The legislation is a piecemeal immigration reform measure that applies to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16. The bill grants applicants resident status and a door to naturalization so long as they meet specific requirements:

Eligible immigrants must have entered the U.S. before age 16, lived in the country at least five consecutive years before the bill's enactment; ...admitted to a college or earned a high-school diploma or GED certificate; and should have no serious criminal record.

Here are the arguments against it followed by a rebuttal from The Economist:

- **This Is a Cynical Move, writes David Frum at The Week:**

The DREAM Act cannot pass. It's not meant to pass. It's not meant even to come to a vote. It's meant to mobilize and excite Latino voters in advance of 2012. It's a ruse and a sham. But it's also an appalling, deceptive piece of legislation with very sinister consequences.

- **It's Expensive, writes Steven Camarota at the Center for Immigration Studies:**

On average, each illegal immigrant who attends a public institution will receive a tuition subsidy from taxpayers of nearly \$6,000 for each year he or she attends, for total cost of \$6.2 billion a year, not including other forms of financial assistance they may also receive.

- **It's Susceptible to Fraud, writes Mark Krikorian at National Review:**

Perhaps one-fourth of those legalized under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act received amnesty fraudulently, including Mahmud Abouhalima, a leader of the first World Trade Center attack. The fraud in that first big amnesty program was so pervasive as to be almost comical, with people claiming work histories here that included picking watermelons from trees and digging cherries out of the ground...

This is like playing a slot machine without having to put any money in — any illegal alien can apply, and if he wins, great, but if he loses, he can't be prosecuted *even if he lied through his*

teeth about everything. No amnesty proposal can be taken seriously unless applicants are made to understand, right up front, that any lies, no matter how trivial, will result in arrest and imprisonment.

- **It Sets Up the Wrong Incentives, writes The Heritage Foundation:**

Among several other concerns, the DREAM Act rewards those who violated immigration laws by granting them in-state tuition while state laws deny legal aliens on student visas tuition benefits. The act's lax standards would make it tough to police for fraudulent applicants, while the government would be prohibited using information submitted to deport anyone who files a DREAM Act application and does not qualify.

- **It's Bad Messaging, adds David Frum:**

DREAM sends a message to every teenager on planet Earth: Come to America. If you enter the United States before age 16, and if you can remain here for five years (or can buy papers that purport to show you have lived here for five years), you're as good as a citizen already. No deportation proceedings. No risk that your application will be used against you. Lenient and subsidized requirements for permanent residency. What's not to love?

- **Dissent: It Seems Pretty Reasonable, writes The Economist's Democracy in America blog:**

Suppose your parents moved to America from Mexico without legal permission when you were five years old. You grow up in America. You graduate from high school in America. You're an American in every sense except the legal one. You want to go to college, but because your parents came into the country illicitly, you don't qualify for government financial aid, and you can't get legal work. If caught by immigration authorities, you face the possibility of detention or deportation, even though this is, in every sense, your home. That doesn't seem fair. Every year, over 60,000 kids like you graduate high school in the United States. And unless something like the DREAM Act becomes law, you and they will become part of a growing class of marginalised and unprotected Americans without papers. Even then, the papers are no sure thing. You've got to serve in the military or get a couple years of college under your belt, and stay out of trouble. But at least you'll someday have the chance to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as your date to the prom. This strikes me as sensible and humane, if a little over-demanding.

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