

DREAM-ing of Amnesty

Every day, I hear from frustrated constituents wanting to know when their government will begin to take federal immigration laws seriously. One of the primary responsibilities of the federal government is to protect the citizens and legal residents of this country by enforcing current laws – not reward those who break them.

Unfortunately, recently proposed legislation in the House of Representatives will do just that. The so-called DREAM Act, which narrowly passed the Democrat-controlled House last year but was rightfully rejected by the Senate, would grant conditional residency to as many as two million illegal immigrants under the age of 32 who entered the United States before the age of 16 and put them on a path to citizenship.

Under the DREAM Act, these individuals would be eligible for a wide array of taxpayer subsidized benefits, such as federal student loans and work-study programs. They would also be entitled to receive in-state tuition at our nation's public colleges and universities. Even more disturbing, once the DREAM Act's amnesty recipients become citizens and reach the age of 21, they can then sponsor their illegal immigrant parents for legalization.

While granting amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants is bad enough, the bill fails to include protections against likely fraud and abuse. In fact, the DREAM Act makes it possible for almost any illegal immigrant to evade the law. Once an illegal alien files an application, no matter how fraudulent, the federal government is prohibited from deporting them. Widespread fraud likely will drive the number of those given amnesty much higher as many illegal immigrants falsely claim that they arrived in the United States before the age of 16. In addition, the Department of Homeland Security can waive any requirements in the bill due to hardship.

We only need to look back twenty-five years to see that rewarding illegal behavior only encourages more. In 1986, the United States awarded amnesty to three million illegal immigrants. Instead of reducing the number of those entering our country illegally, the current number of illegal immigrants in the United States is estimated to be anywhere from eleven million to as many as twenty million. With illegal immigration costing taxpayers over \$113 billion a year, it would be devastating - especially in these economically challenging times - to enact a policy that would encourage more individuals to illegally cross our borders and compete with Americans for jobs.

We are an open and welcoming society. However, we simply cannot allow our immigration laws to be violated and ignored. Rather than enacting a plan to put illegal immigrants on a path to citizenship, Congress must continue efforts to strengthen enforcement along the southwest border, remove loopholes in current law that invites manipulation of our laws, and shut down the job magnet that encourages illegals to come to the United States.

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