



Sample Op-Ed on the DREAM Act

Three years ago, the U.S. Armed Forces struggled with a serious recruiting crisis, a crisis that evaporated temporarily only because of the economic downturn. As the economy recovers and our population continues to age, our Armed Forces will face yet another challenge in recruiting the high quality people needed for the modern military. It is no secret that several of the military services expect to experience difficulties recruiting eligible enlisted soldiers in future years. For that reason, in its FY10-12 Strategic Plan, the Department of Defense identified the DREAM Act as a smart way to expand the pool of potential candidates because it lets high achieving young people enlist.

The Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act is a bipartisan bill that would provide a conditional pathway to legal permanent residence for certain unauthorized youth who, as children, were brought to the U.S. They must graduate from high school, demonstrate good moral character, and—to keep their legal status—complete at least two years of higher education or serve for at least two years in the U.S. military.

Without the relief of the DREAM Act, the future of these American-educated young people is bleak. About 65,000 eligible students graduate from U.S. high schools each year, but upon graduation, these young people—who include honor roll students, star athletes, and junior ROTC members—face a roadblock. Instead of advancing to college or the military and later repaying the investment that taxpayers made in their education, they live in fear of being discovered by the Department of Homeland Security and deported to their “home” country, even if it is a country they cannot remember and where they have no friends, family, or support.

Two potential DREAM Act students are David Cho, a senior honors student at UCLA, and Cesar Vargas, a third year law student at CUNY. Cho who dreams of joining the Air Force after graduation is at the top of his class and has lived here since he was nine. Vargas who has lived here since he was five, he wants to be a military lawyer after graduation. David and Cesar are exactly the kind of recruits the military needs: self-motivated and eager to defend the country they love. Without the DREAM Act, both will be deported.

Former Acting Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy Bill Carr has called the DREAM Act “very appealing” to the military because it applies to the “cream of the crop” of students. Potential DREAM Act beneficiaries like David and Cesar are likely to be a military recruiter’s dream candidates for enlistment; they are not “bottom of the barrel” recruits even if they have no legal status. DREAM Act beneficiaries have no adult period of residence in a foreign country, which might make a background check difficult for security clearance purposes. They often speak both English and another language fluently. Many have participated in Junior ROTC in high school. They do not have criminal records or other evidence of bad character. They have graduated from a U.S. high school.

If approved as DREAM Act beneficiaries, they will have passed rigorous criminal background and security checks from DHS. They will have “conditional lawful residence,” a status that is recognized under current military recruiting regulations; thus, the military will not have to change its regulations or process their enlistments differently from other recruits. Finally, they will be motivated to serve the United States so as to be given a chance to stay here.

Opponents of the DREAM Act call it a “sugar coated” amnesty that only rewards law breakers. To them, the best solution to the problem of illegal residents who are also high achieving students with dreams of serving in the military is deportation; even though deporting these young people confers a massive benefit on their countries of birth while depriving the United States of their talents. Instead of wearing our uniforms, these recruits could be recruited to work for foreign governments, foreign militaries, and foreign intelligence agencies. At a time when we are focused on protecting our borders and quashing threats to our national security, it seems unwise to export thousands of American-educated and American-acclimated young people to militaries other than our own.

The House and Senate are poised to act on the DREAM Act during the current lame duck session of Congress. The vote on the DREAM Act presents an opportunity for our lawmakers to vote to increase military recruitment, enhance US national security, and help high achieving young people at the same time. I strongly urge members of Congress to pass this long overdue measure.