

Resolved: In Connecticut, illegal immigrant college students should be eligible to receive academic financial aid including in-state tuition rates.

Illegal immigrants, students fast to revive bill

By: JULIANA BARBASSA - Associated Press Writer

SAN FRANCISCO -- Even as most of the nation wolfed down burgers at backyard barbecues, about 35 students around the state refused to eat in hopes of bringing back a federal proposal that would help illegal immigrants go to college and become legal.

In San Jose, five students spent Wednesday -- their third day without food -- amid banners and dozens of supporters in front of U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren's office to ask their representative to bring back the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act. The DREAM Act, as it is known, had been folded into the immigration reform proposal shot down in the Senate last week.

This bit of the defeated bill, co-sponsored by Lofgren, would allow illegal immigrants who graduate from U.S. high schools to become temporary residents, qualifying for in-state tuition and financial aid, if they went to college or joined the military. If they stayed out of trouble and met these requirements, they could become permanent legal residents.

The students fasting this week -- some for four days, some for seven -- hoped their stand, taken at a time when the nation is focused on what it means to be American, would sway legislators to give this proposal another shot.

"We want our Congresspeople to take action and not be afraid of political drawbacks," said one of the fasters, Cesar Juarez, 21, an undocumented immigrant studying at San Jose State University.

Critics of the measure say giving in to undocumented immigrants, even in areas like education, might encourage others to enter the country illegally to take advantage of the programs. And any time someone who is not authorized to be in the United States gets a scholarship or financial aid, that means less money for the students who are here legitimately, opponents argue.

But the measure was one of the least divisive pieces of the massive bill, which would have created a path to citizenship for the approximately 12 million illegal immigrants in the country, strengthened the border and beefed up immigration enforcement. In the days following the bill's demise, some lawmakers expressed hope that Congress would take another look at this proposal.

The students wanted to keep that possibility alive, saying they can best serve the country by studying and working legally.

"I just want to be able to contribute to my community," said another of the fasters, Nalleli Sandoval, 21, a psychology major at San Jose State University. "We're not trying to live off of anybody, we just want to be able to make our living, travel, work."

Sandoval moved to the United States with her parents from Jalisco, Mexico, when she was nine years old. Because she's undocumented, she can't get financial aid, grants and most scholarships.

There are about 65,000 illegal immigrants who graduate from American high schools each year and find themselves in Sandoval's situation.

Although California is one of nine states that allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at public institutions, these students often have to work full time while in school to finance their education, they said.

Once they graduate, they find that without legal documents they can't work in their fields.

"I have a lot of goals, but always in the back of my head is the knowledge that because I'm not legal, I can't get far," said Sandoval, who wants to be an educational counselor.

In Bakersfield, labor leader Dolores Huerta encouraged the 14 students who were fasting there as they waited in a public park for 18 more from the Los Angeles area.

The group planned to travel to San Jose and then to San Francisco on Thursday. Some students planned to break their fast Thursday at a rally in front of San Francisco's City Hall. Others planned to go without food until Monday, when they would rally in front of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office and ask for her support for the proposal.

Rell vetoes in-state tuition rates for illegal immigrant kids

By Susan Haigh, Associated Press | June 26, 2007

HARTFORD, Conn. --Republican Gov. M. Jodi Rell on Tuesday vetoed a bill that would have extended favorable in-state tuition rates at Connecticut's public colleges and universities to children of illegal immigrants.

While Rell said she is sympathetic to the plight of the students, she said they are living in the U.S. illegally and she does not want to encourage people to circumvent federal immigration laws.

"I understand these students are not responsible for their undocumented status, having come to the U.S. with their parents," Rell said in a written statement. "The fact remains, however, that these students and their parents are here illegally and neither sympathy nor good intentions can ameliorate that fact."

The bill passed the Senate 21-15 and the House of Representatives 77-68, making it doubtful the Democratic majority will attempt to override the veto.

Rep. Felipe Reinoso, D-Bridgeport, a Peruvian immigrant who sponsored the bill, said he had held out hope that Rell would sign the proposal into law.

"I feel sad -- deeply, deeply disappointed," said Reinoso, who estimated the bill would have helped about 200 to 250 students. "The kids are paying the consequences."

Rell said the legislation does not address the fact that the students are not legal residents.

"The requirement that students file an application to legalize their status, would in essence, be notification to the government that they are here illegally and it would greatly increase the likelihood that they would be deported," Rell said. In her veto letter, the governor said the legislation could encourage more undocumented aliens to move to the state.

Senate President Pro Tem Donald E. Williams Jr., D-Brooklyn, said the legislation requires a student to have lived in the state and graduated from a Connecticut high school.

"We're not talking about somebody who just got off a bus and popped into the state without legal status and now wants some benefit," he said. "We're talking about someone who has made a commitment to the state."

Reinoso said many families have applied for citizenship, but it often takes anywhere from five to 10 years to get approval.

Sen. Dan Debicella, R-Shelton, successfully ran out the clock when the bill came up for debate in the legislature's Higher Education Committee, killing the proposal. But the legislation was resurrected later in the session.

The freshman senator said his heart goes out to the families trying to educate their children, but he believes it would be unfair to legal immigrants and middle class residents if in-state tuition rates were granted to undocumented students.

"The answer is to reform the federal laws to make it easier for hardworking committed immigrants to earn legal residency," Debicella said.

Rep. Sean Williams, R-Watertown, praised Rell for taking a risk with her veto.

"Gov. Rell showed great political courage when she vetoed a bill that has garnered editorial support from several Connecticut newspapers that will be denouncing her decision over the next few days," he said. "Gov. Rell did not take the politically correct action today, but she did the right thing -- and I commend her for it."

A 1996 federal law sought to prevent states from granting in-state tuition benefits to unauthorized immigrant students. Since then, 10 states have passed legislation to allow students who have lived in their states for a long time to be eligible for the tuition break if they meet certain requirements, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. The states include California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Washington.

Reinoso said he's not giving up and plans to reintroduce the bill next year.

"It is in my heart, that bill," he said. "You cannot ignore kids. They're not invisible. This is the reality in our country and our state now." ■

College Students See Veto of California Dream Act as Contrary to American Values of Hard Work, Achievement, and Reward.

Vow to continue efforts for access and affordability of higher education in California, including Dream Act in 2008

By Oiyen Poon

President

University of California Student Association

Students throughout the University of California with our peers at the California State University and California Community Colleges are frustrated by the Governor's lack of human compassion represented by his veto of the California DREAM Act (SB 1). Although this is a setback in the statewide efforts to ensure the California DREAM for all Californians, the UC Student Association will continue to fight for access and affordability of the UC system for all UC students.

In the past couple months UCSA students have worked with Senator Cedillo and Speaker Nunez on bringing SB 1 to the Governor's desk. We have worked with community organizations throughout the state to register voters, organize rallies, fax blasts, letter writing campaigns, and call-in days to ask the Governor to affirm the California DREAM.

We did this work because we know that many undocumented students immigrated to California as very young children, and for reasons out of their own control they are currently undocumented residents of California. While the federal government continues its struggles to implement fair and just immigration reform, undocumented immigrant scholar youth - some of the best students in California and throughout the U.S. - are being unfairly denied the support they deserve.

In the Governor's veto message he noted rising fees in the UC and Cal State systems saying 'It would not be prudent to place additional strain on the General Fund' for undocumented students. As the voice of students, UCSA can speak with authority on the issue of skyrocketing fees. We too believe that fees are another barrier to the access and affordability of higher education in California. But we know that the issues of fees and financial aid for undocumented students must be addressed dually. This mindset is confirmed among the other supporters of this bill including the California State and community college student associations, UC Regents and the California Faculty Association, all who are very familiar with the challenges of decreased state support for California public higher education.

The United States has always been a nation that espouses reward for hard work and achievement. AB 540 students in our colleges and universities have overcome countless obstacles and adversities, and many still consistently earn stellar grades and contribute significantly to our California communities. By vetoing the California DREAM Act, the

Governor sent a message to these students that directly contradicts the American values of hard work, achievement, and reward.

As a child of immigrants and as a student leader, I view the veto of the California DREAM as a message from the Governor that hard work and talent do not count for much in California.

Although the vetoing of SB 1 is a grave end to this legislative session, we hope that Governor Schwarzenegger will sign the California DREAM Act into law next year, during his self-proclaimed year of Education. As students, we are proud of our hard work to pass the California DREAM Act out of the state legislature. We will now turn our energy and resources toward working with the UC Regents, who recently adopted a comprehensive Diversity Statement, to implement UC policy to make AB 540 students eligible for University-based financial aid. We will also be back with more fervor to halt fee increases and pass the California DREAM Act next year.

Maria's hopes rest on a DREAM

Read two previous columns about Maria at www.seattletimes.com/opinion/

Five years ago, I wrote about Maria, a fresh high-school graduate who punctuated her talk about future plans with an occasional teenage giggle.

Though she had a University of Washington acceptance letter, Maria's future was not so bright. Maria — not her real name — had been living in the United States illegally since her parents brought her here at age 5. Thanks to the state Legislature's 2006 decision, students in Maria's predicament could pay lower in-state tuition — she could afford her degree. She graduated with a GPA north of 3.5 and honors in her department.

Now the girl is a shrewd and gutsy woman at the start of her second year at a Puget Sound area law school. Last week when we talked, she requested to do a pre-publication review of my column.

Uh, *no!* I told the budding lawyer. But I had to smile.

My young friend has matured immensely but still labors under her secret and the nation's stunted immigration system that threatens to dim her future. By all rights, save one, she should have the world by the tail. She is dogged by questions: When she graduates, will she be able to take the bar exam? Will she be able to keep helping low-income people as she's done during her internship this summer for a nonprofit legal-aid organization?

"The DREAM Act is my only hope," said Maria, echoing words she spoke when I checked in with her two years ago. "I hope and pray for it."

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act of 2007 would give certain young people like Maria a chance to earn legal residency if they enlist in the military or attend college for at least two years. They must have been brought to the United States before age 15, lived here for more than five years, graduated from high school and have good moral character.

America needs comprehensive immigration reform. But after hopelessly stalled attempts this year, it likely won't happen until after the 2008 presidential election. Nevertheless, the DREAM Act — a less-controversial part of the debate — should be peeled off.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., is expected to try that this week. The Senate majority whip expects to offer the measure as an amendment to the defense-authorization bill, his spokeswoman said. The connection is that young people can earn legal status through military service.

Support is bipartisan. Among 26 co-sponsors are prominent Democrats, including presidential hopefuls Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, and both of Washington's senators. Leading Republicans John McCain of Arizona, Richard Lugar of Indiana and Chuck Hagel of Nebraska are on board too.

But the 60 votes needed for anything to pass the Senate these days is a high hurdle, especially with the horse-trading bound to go on over defense spending.

I hope these young people are not lost in the politics. They have beaten the odds, many of them succeeding despite low family incomes and parents without much, if any, formal education themselves. Despite the dimmest of prospects, these kids have not only survived but achieved. In her high school, Maria was an elected student-body officer for three years.

Yet, in the most important ways, they must live in shadows, suffering not from their own actions but their parents' decisions to bring them into the country illegally.

These are kids on your daughter's soccer team and at your son's birthday party. A 2005 Pew Hispanic Center report estimated 1.7 million children under age 18 are living in the United States illegally.

Lucy Bottomley is another who has been caught in her parents' mistakes. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement intended to deport her two days ago — even though she was just five credits short of her Washington State University bachelor's degree. Brought to the United States at 10 from her native England, the aspiring teacher was stunned to learn at age 20 that her American stepfather never applied for her permanent legal status.

Fortunately, immigration officials relented and deferred her deportation until the New Year. She'll still be sent to a country she barely remembers.

Are Maria and Lucy the kind of young people our society should throw away — especially after investing in their public education?

I don't think so.

Only the DREAM Act will help Bottomley stay in the country she calls home, where she can teach young people to speak up for themselves as she has; only the DREAM Act will ensure the bright young lawyer, Maria, will be able to speak for low-income people without the means or wherewithal to advocate for themselves.

It's time for their dreams and the dreams of so many others to become a reality.