I HAVE A DREAM ACT

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With election season just behind us and Obama re-elected for a second term, change is in the air. One change has the potential to affect more than 1.4 million people living in the United States. This group of individuals is the US population of undocumented persons, often incorrectly referred to as “illegal immigrants.”

Laws, acts, bills, and amendments to change the situation of these persons have been discussed for decades, but there is one that might actually stick. Pitched to Congress in 2001, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) act gave immigrants hope for a better life. Those who have lived in this country for a majority of their lives and consider themselves Americans now have the opportunity to obtain the official documentation to give them citizenship.

A majority of undocumented persons are Hispanic and reside mostly in states like Texas and California, but there is a range of multicultural individuals residing in states around the country that the DREAM act would benefit. After much rejection and revision, the act is finally picking up steam. On June 15, 2012, Secretary Napolitano presented a memorandum specifying the requirements an immigrant must meet to be eligible for U.S. citizenship. They are as follows:

- Came to the United States before the age of sixteen;
- Has continuously resided in the
If an illegal immigrant meets these requirements they are given a 6-year temporary or “conditional” visa. This visa would allow the individual to carry on through higher education or enlist in the military. After six years, if the individual has completed 2 years of college or served 2 years in the military and are deemed of “good moral standing” they are granted complete U.S. citizenship. But what does it mean to be of “good moral standing?”

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will look at the criminal record of the person in question, but there is also a subjective interpretation that we’ve become very familiar with since 9/11: that the person “poses a threat to national security.” This statement is just vague enough to mean anything. Besides misdemeanor charges, DHS doesn't list an exact set of actions that would be considered threatening to national security, so this situation can be construed as anything they want it to be.

What if an increase in population became a threat according to DHS? Some citizens are concerned about such matters. As mentioned...
earlier, 1.4 million undocumented persons would be eligible for citizenship. Would the DREAM act become a gateway for more “illegal immigration?”

Like any act, the DREAM act has its benefits as well as its pitfalls. This act would allow illegal immigrants to legally attend a university and pursue a higher level of education beyond that of secondary school, but at what cost? With their temporary visa they would be eligible for loans and work-study but no other financial aid would be granted to them. This act would not force universities to grant the DREAMers in-state tuition and so they would then have to find a way to pay the full out-of-state tuition. The individual will then have the U.S. citizenship they’ve wanted for their entire lives but also a pile of debt to go with it.

The DREAM act has the potential to do great things for the people living in this country. However, when trying to tackle such a controversial national issue as undocumented persons, there is no way to successfully deal with it in one document. It has been 11 years since the act was first presented to legislators. With the age limit posted on this act, how many more hopeful immigrants will watch their eligibility slip away as they turn 30 and the act isn’t passed? What happens to those individuals too old to gain what we are given at birth? Do they continue to live their lives worried about deportation, forced to work low-level jobs? Though this act still has its bugs to work out, we as a nation need to move forward and act. Those that came here as children, with no choice in the matter, and understand America to be their home, should have the same opportunities as anyone else who has lived here their entire lives. They are U.S. citizens in all but name, but it’s time to give those DREAMers something to dream for.