

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE DREAM ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, during the course of the deliberation on this Defense authorization bill, it has been my intention to offer an amendment to the so-called DREAM Act. The DREAM Act is a narrowly tailored, bipartisan measure that would give a select group of undocumented young people in America the chance to become legal residents if they came to this country as children, are currently long-term U.S. residents, have good moral character, no criminal record, and are willing to either enlist in the U.S. military or to attend college for at least 2 years.

The cosponsors of this amendment include Senators HAGEL, LUGAR, HATCH, BINGAMAN, BOXER, CANTWELL, CLINTON, FEINSTEIN, KERRY, LEAHY, LIEBERMAN, MENENDEZ, MURRAY, NELSON of Florida, and OBAMA. It is a bipartisan measure; it has been from the start. It says to a select group of immigrant students who grew up in our country: America is going to give you a chance. We will give you the opportunity to earn your way to legal status if you meet each and every one of the following requirements: You came to the United States before the age of 15; you have been continually present in the United States for at least 5 years; you are 29 years or younger when the DREAM Act becomes law, have good moral character, have not engaged in criminal activity or terrorist activity of any kind, not participated in alien smuggling; you have graduated from a U.S. high school; and you will serve in the military or attend college for at least 2 years.

This bill means a lot to me, but it means even more to a lot of young people across this country. Time and again I run into these young men and women. Some of them came to America as toddlers, as infants. They were brought into this country by their parents, certainly with no voice in the decision, and they grew up here. They attended our schools. Now they have reached a point in their lives where they want to go forward to make decisions about their careers. They are frustrated because they have no legal status.

I have run into specific cases time and again, and since I introduced this bill I have met so many of these students. It strikes me as interesting that we are at a point in American history that we say we do not have enough skilled workers, so we have to have H1-B visa holders come in from overseas; engineers, scientists, doctors, nurses who come in for 3-year periods of time

to supplement America's workforce because we do not have enough skilled people. And here we have a group of people who are graduates of high school, prepared to go to college or serve in our military, who, under our law as currently written, are being told: Leave. We do not need you. We do not want you.

If you meet these people, you will come to understand the potential they bring to America's future: the young Korean-American woman I met through my office, who is an accomplished pianist, plays classical piano in symphonies and has been accepted at the most prestigious music school in America to forward her career in music; a young Indian girl who is studying to be a dentist at a university in Illinois; a young Hispanic male who has just completed his graduate degree at an Illinois university in microbiology whose goal is to be a researcher for either a government agency or a pharmaceutical company, looking for cures for diseases.

Future nurses, future teachers, future doctors, scientists, and engineers, I have met them. They are the valedictorians of their high school classes, they are the role models for kids in their communities, they are people with an extraordinary wealth of talent looking for a chance to prove themselves.

Each and every one of them is without a country, without a country because they were brought to the United States as children by their parents with, as I mentioned earlier, no voice in that decision. And this is all they know. This is what they want. This is the country they identify with, the country they want to be part of.

That is why I introduced this bill some 5 years ago and have worked on it ever since. People ask: Why would you offer the DREAM Act as an amendment to the Defense authorization bill? Well, there are pretty compelling reasons for doing that. We are having trouble recruiting and retaining soldiers for our Army. We are accepting more applicants for the U.S. Army who are high school dropouts, applicants who have low scores on the military aptitude test, and even some with criminal backgrounds.

Under the DREAM Act, thousands of well-qualified potential recruits for the military would become eligible for the first time, and many are eager to serve in the Armed Forces, to stand up for the country they love and the country they want to be part of.

Under the DREAM Act, they have a strong incentive to enlist because it gives them a path to permanent legal status. Most people do not know that in the ranks of the military today we have about 40,000 men and women who are not citizens of the United States. They are legal residents, but they are not citizens.

I met some of them when I went to Iraq and went to a Marine Corps camp. One in particular sticks in my mem-

ory: a young man who, as I walked through the ranks of Illinois marines, handed me a brown envelope and said: Senator, can you help me become a citizen? I would really like to vote someday.

You do not easily forget that kind of a request from a young man who later that day would strap on his body armor, his helmet, take his weapon, and go out and fight alongside American citizens who were also members of the Marine Corps. The same is true in the Army; the same is true in many of our military services. We do not make it a condition of military service that you be a citizen, only that you currently be a legal resident.

Of course, we know, sadly, that if that soldier or another one like him was killed in combat, we would award them citizenship posthumously. Does that sound right? Does it sound right that someone who is willing to serve, defend our country, take an oath of loyalty to our Nation, risk his life, perhaps be injured, does it make sense for us to say to them: Well, you are good, good enough to serve in the military but not good enough to be an American citizen?

Now, think of those young people, many of whom would step forward today, raise their hand, and proudly serve in the military. Now, this bill, the DREAM Act, does not mandate military service. I would not do that. We have a volunteer military, and I want to keep it that way. A student who is otherwise eligible could earn legal status by attending college as well. That is consistent with the spirit of a volunteer military force, that we do not force young people to enlist as a condition of status.

But there is a strong incentive for military service. Those who analyze it say, you know what. These young people who would be eligible to serve in the military through the DREAM Act are exactly the kind of people we want. A 2004 survey by the Rand Corporation found that 45 percent of Hispanic males, 31 percent of Hispanic females between the ages of 16 and 21, were likely to serve in the Armed Forces. That is 45 percent of Hispanic males compared to 24 percent of White males; 31 percent of Hispanic females compared to 10 percent of White women.

It is important to note that immigrants have an outstanding tradition of service in the military. About 8,000 enlist each year, those with legal status but not in the DREAM Act category.

Last night, like many Americans, I watched a documentary prepared by Kenneth Burns called "The War," about World War II. There was an especially touching part of it about one of our colleagues, Senator DANNY INOUE of Hawaii, a man of Japanese ancestry, who enlisted in the Army from Hawaii when our Government decided to take a chance on these Japanese Americans and see if maybe they would stand up for America, even to fight our enemies, which included the nation of Japan.

They hoped to get 1,500 draftees out of Hawaii.

When DANNY INOUE, our colleague, volunteered and enlisted, he was one of 10,000 who stepped forward to serve. He told this touching story of taking the streetcar with his dad, off to catch the boat for military training, and how his dad reminded him how good this country had been to him and to his family and urged him to serve with honor and never dishonor his family's name.

DANNY INOUE told that story like no one else could because, of course, he served and became an officer in the U.S. Army. During an invasion in Italy, he was gravely wounded, lost his left arm, and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for the valor he showed in combat. People worried at that time whether they should take a chance with Japanese Americans. Could we really trust them? Would they really fight for America and be loyal? DANNY INOUE and thousands of others proved that they would.

The same question is being raised about these young people. These are young people who are undocumented. They don't technically have citizenship. They certainly don't have one in America. They are asking for a chance to serve. We are told they want to serve in greater numbers than most others.

A recent study by the Center for Naval Analyses concluded "non-citizens have high rates of success while serving [in the military]—they are far more likely . . . to fulfill their enlistment obligations than their U.S.-born counterparts."

The Pentagon recognizes the merit of the DREAM Act. Bill Carr, Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, recently said that the DREAM Act is "very appealing" to the military because it would apply to the "cream of the crop of students." Mr. Carr concluded that the DREAM Act would be "good for readiness."

The DREAM Act is also supported by a broad coalition of military experts, education, business, labor, civil rights and religious leaders from across the political spectrum and around the country. Last week, I received a letter supporting the DREAM Act from over 60 national organizations: the American Federation of State and County Municipal Employees, the American Federation of Teachers, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Baptist Churches, the Asian-American Justice Center, the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Episcopal Migration Ministries, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Congress, the Jesuit Conference, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, National Council of Jewish Women, National Council of La Raza, National Education Association, Service Employees International Union, and UNITE HERE.

Thomas Wenski is bishop of Orlando, FL. He issued a statement on behalf of the U.S. Catholic Bishops supporting the DREAM Act. I would like to read it into the Record:

For those who call this legislation an amnesty, I say shame on you. These are children who were brought to this country illegally through no fault of their own . . . The United States is the only country and home many of them know.

Are we to deport some of our future leaders to a country they do not know in the name of an unjust law? Should we forsake these young people because we lack the political will and courage to provide them a just remedy?

Our elected officials should resist the voices of dissension and fear this time and vote for the DREAM Act. By investing in these young people, our nation will receive benefits for years to come. It also is the right and moral thing to do.

Last week, John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO, issued a statement. He said:

[The DREAM Act] will go a long way in remedying the injustices that these hard-working and law-abiding children face. We strongly support passage of the DREAM Act . . .

Students who qualify for the DREAM Act are graduating at the top of their class; they are honor roll students, star athletes and valedictorians. They have lived in the United States most of their lives; this is the only country they know. These children are as committed to their communities and to this country as their American-born classmates. Yet, because they lack legal status, they do not have the same opportunities to education or to a decent job.

This is the choice the DREAM Act presents to us. We can allow a generation of immigrant students with great potential and ambitions to contribute more fully to our society and national security or we can relegate them to a future in the shadows, which would be a loss for all Americans.

Since I introduced this bill about 5 years ago, I have run into many of these same students. Life goes on for them. They don't qualify for Federal loans, for grants. They are trying to make it through college. They borrow the money and try to come up with it, delay their education, if they can. Occasionally, in the few weeks when I get back in their neighborhoods, they will come and see me. They will walk up to me and say: Senator, what is new with the DREAM Act? It isn't just an idle question of someone who might follow legislative activity; this is a question which will decide their lives for them. It will decide whether we cast them aside, reject them, say we don't need their talent and dreams and their idealism or whether we will vote for this bill and give these young people a chance.

When I hear some describe this as amnesty, I wonder, if someone is willing to risk his or her life to serve in our military in a combat zone, is that a giveaway? Is that citizenship for nothing? I don't think so. It has really been fundamental that we don't hold children responsible for the errors and crimes of their parents. Why, then,

would we hold these children responsible?

When I hear some of the critics talk about the millions who will benefit from this, those numbers don't match up to reality. To qualify for this, you have to graduate from high school. Fifty percent of Hispanic students don't graduate from high school. So already these students have beaten the odds. Then how many of these same Hispanic students go on to finish the first year of college? An even smaller percentage. The numbers go down. So we are talking about an elite group of students with great potential who can make this a greater nation, and we are talking about an elite group of undocumented students willing to risk their lives for America.

I ask my colleagues to cast aside some of the rhetoric which is divisive and sometimes unfair about these young people. Take the time to meet them. Sit down and talk to them. You will see in their faces and in their conversation the kind of idealism, the kind of aspiration for a greater America we can only hope for from the next generation.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CHIP REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, 10 years ago the Senate created the Children's Health Insurance Program to help States provide health coverage for low-income kids across America. It is known as CHIP. It provides cost-effective health coverage to millions of kids. It is truly the biggest success story in health care in America in the past decade. We have reduced the number of uninsured children in our Nation by one-third. With the help of the CHIP program, my State of Illinois launched a statewide initiative to cover all kids, setting an important precedent for other States to follow. Over 300,000 kids in Illinois have insurance, but there are still thousands more we need to reach.

The 15 million uninsured children in America in 1997 are now 9 million nationwide. That is still far too many. Unfortunately, the Bush administration does not view the Senate bill as the carefully crafted compromise it is but sees it as a threat—in their words, "a step down the path of government-run health care for every American." Let me assure them, this bill falls far short of anything resembling universal