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White House & Clergy Urge Passage of DREAM Act

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Distinctly Catholic

The White House hosted a press call this morning about the DREAM Act. Heather Higginbottom, Deputy Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, noted that the bill would assist some 65,000 students who, upon graduating from high school, are unable to go to college or join the military because they lack proper documentation. Their parents brought them to the U.S. when they were children without proper visas. The DREAM Act was drafted a decade ago by both Democrats and Republicans.

Higginbottom noted that the DREAM Act has been supported by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, originally appointed by George W. Bush, who wrote members of the Senate arguing that the law would help with recruitment efforts, a pressing concern while the war in Afghanistan drags on. Joshua Dubois, head of the White House Office for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Initiatives, called this a "critical moment for the government" and for the young people the law is aimed at helping.

Several religious leaders spoke on the call. Rabbi Jack Moline of Alexandria, Virginia noted that his children attend T. C. Williams High School where the student body is so diverse more than 40 first languages are represented. Moline said that most of those students are citizens but some are not, yet they share the same dreams, cheer for the same teams, etc. He liked the situation of these students to the Biblical "resident strangers," and also invoked the memory of the Israelite exile in Egypt.

Pastor Joel Hunter of Longwood, Florida spoke to the basic morality of the law. "You just don't punish kids for something their parents did." And, Pastor Rich Nathan of Columbus, Ohio said he had never seen such unanimity among diverse religious communities as on this issue, including conservative evangelicals and the Catholic bishops who support the bill. "This is a piece of legislation conservatives can love," Nathan said, noting that it does not require a government program or any form of government assistance. "It is opportunity-based."

The pastors declined to speculate on the bill's chances at final passage. The Senate schedule is up in the air at this time, but you can bet Sen. Harry Reid, who won re-election on the strength of the Latino vote in Nevada will be sure to bring the measure to a vote.

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