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DREAM Act Fails: Profiles in Cowardice

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 18, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

By a vote of 55-41, the U.S. Senate this morning failed to invoke cloture on the DREAM Act, effectively killing the bill.

Among those voting against the measure were five Democrats, Senators Max Baucus and John Tester of Montana, Kay Hagan of North Carolina, Mark Pryor of Arkansas and Ben Nelson of Nebraska. Shame on them all.

A big heaping of shame on Sen. Sam Brownback, a convert to Catholicism, who said he would vote no but hoped the bill passed. That is the quintessence of political cowardice.

Three Republicans boke ranks and voted for cloture: Sen. Richard Lugar of Indiana, Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, and Sen. Robert Bennett of Utah. Mr. Bennett lost his renomination battle last year, but he still gets a prize for breaking with party discipline to do the right thing. Dick Lugar, not for the first time, has proven he puts policy before partisanship. Ms. Murkowski, who won re-election as an Independent, gave notice that the Republicans cannot count on her vote at all times.

This is a sad day for the country and a very sad day for the Catholic Church. The bishops lobbied hard for this bill, but they lacked the juice even to convince someone like Brownback and Nelson, with whom the USCCB has worked closely, to do the right thing. The bishops tried and they are well advised to consider why their influence was insufficient to pass a bill that so empitomized essential justice.

The White House also deserves high praise for their efforts to push this bill, but the lesson here is that they cannot count on the votes of Democratic senators from conservative states, especially on social issues. The White House must do what it can to help Latinos organize in advance of the 2012 elections. We need more members of both parties committed to achieving justice for them.

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