



Hard-liners Blast ‘Conservative’ DREAM Act Alternative

Brendan Kirby

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Immigration hard-liners on Monday panned an amnesty bill described as a “conservative” alternative to the DREAM Act.

Sens. Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), James Lankford (R-Okla.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) formally introduced the Solution for Undocumented Children through Careers, Employment, Education, and Defending our Nation (SUCCEED) Act. It is similar to the DREAM Act — an acronym for the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act — but would have more stringent eligibility requirements aimed at granting permanent legal status to the most productive of illegal immigrants brought to America as children.

William Gheen, president of the Americans for Legal Immigration political action committee, said he plans to travel to Washington this week to lobby against the proposal.

“I really do wish these politicians in Washington would spend half as much time on American kids as illegal aliens,” he said.

Under the SUCCEED Act, illegal immigrants could apply for conditional permanent residence until they turn 18. After then, they could apply for a five-year renewal as long as they maintain gainful employment for at least 48 of the 60 months, earn a postsecondary or vocational degree or serve honorably in the military for at least three years.

After that five-year period, they could renew their status for an additional five years and then become eligible for a green card. The beneficiaries would not be able to become citizens until they have had green cards for five years. Tillis said it would not allow chain migration, which allows new citizens to sponsor their extended families for residency.

“This act is about the children,” he said at a news conference. “It’s completely merit-based. If you work hard, if you follow the law and you pay taxes, you can stay here permanently. It ensures fairness. There’s no skipping in line.”

Lankford said the bill was designed to be one piece of a larger effort to resolve immigration issues like chain migration and border security. But Gheen and other critics dismissed the idea that bill, if passed, would do anything to improve border security or reduce further illegal immigration.

“Why would anyone believe, absent massive enforcement, anything in this new bill is going to happen?” he asked. “We know that the amnesty will happen.”

The libertarian Cato Institute estimated Monday that the Tillis-Lankford bill would cover about 1.5 million illegal immigrants, about the same number that the Migration Policy Institute previously estimated would be eligible for an earlier version of the DREAM Act. Cato estimated that about half that number eventually would become citizens and would result in a net tax revenue gain of \$94.7 billion at the federal, state and local levels over a 75-year period.

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Cato analyst Alex Nowrasteh acknowledged that government-assistance programs could turn a net positive from immigration into a fiscal drain. But he argued that likely would not be the case with those covered by the SUCCEED Act.

“Fortunately, the American welfare state is not so far gone and DREAMers came at young enough ages, earned enough education, and worked to an extent to make up for the expensive deficiencies of our bloated government,” he wrote.

But Ira Mehlman, a spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, said it would subject more American workers to competition for jobs. Without the amnesty, he said, the jobs would be filled by Americans — likely at higher wages, which would boost tax revenue.

Mehlman also questioned how much more rigorous the SUCCEED Act’s eligibility requirements are compared to the DREAM Act.

“It might be marginally,” he said. “But it doesn’t exactly set up stringent requirements.”

Mehlman said any legislation to grant amnesty to illegal immigrants brought to the country when they were children should be limited to those already enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program created by former President Barack Obama’s administration. And it should include passage of the Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment Act, which would cut legal immigration.

“It’s a much broader amnesty,” he said, referring to the SUCCEED Act.

Mehlman also challenged the notion that the bill would not allow chain migration. That is true only in the early years when beneficiaries only have green cards. The bill would allow “amnesty in slow motion,” he said.

“Once they become citizens, all bets are off,” he said.

If Congress opts for the SUCCEED Act over the DREAM Act, Mehlman said, the media will have to change their lingo.

“Are we going to have to now stop referring to these people as dreamers and start calling them succeeders?” he quipped.