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## **DREAM & LGBT Advocates Respond to Political Maneuvering in Senate**

*Decision to block National Defense Authorization Act marks temporary hurdle to DREAM Act and 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' repeal, but advocates call for continued support for stand-alone bills.*

**CHICAGO – September 21, 2010** – This afternoon, the Senate's decision to halt the FY11 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 3454) also means that thousands of undocumented youth and LGBTQ community members will continue to hang in limbo, unable to openly serve their country in the military or pursue higher education in American universities. Advocates express disappointment at the Senate's decision to halt legislation, but express continued support for a stand-alone DREAM Act (S. 729) and repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

On September 14, Senator Harry Reid announced that he would introduce two amendments to the National Defense Authorization Act: a Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act ("DREAM Act") amendment providing a pathway to citizenship for some undocumented youth and a repeal of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" ("DADT") ban on gays serving in the military. Today's halt means that neither of these amendments will be considered by the Senate, as originally expected, this week.

"We elect our Senators to address the challenges that our society faces, and our broken immigration system is most certainly one of those challenges," said Luis Gutierrez, executive director of Latinos Progresando. "Today, our Senators have not only failed to do their jobs, but they have also shown a lack of leadership and courage. Clearly, our immigration system remains in desperate need of repair; the issue is not going away. We will continue to champion a stand-alone DREAM Act as part of just, practical immigration reform."

The DREAM Act and the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" would give the military access to talented men and women who are unable to serve because of their legal status or sexual orientation.

"Until I was discharged under 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell,' I had a great career with the US Navy, including medals, awards and advancements due to my merit," said Jason Gall, a US Navy veteran. "I had come out as gay to a few shipmates, but it wasn't until I was assigned under one particularly homophobic captain that I encountered any resistance or harassment due to my sexuality. I was discharged after three years of service against my will, even though I was considered an essential asset to the fighting team. It was not my shipmate's morale, nor a suffering 'unit cohesion' that led to my discharge, but a commanding officer who was willing to sacrifice my service and training to uphold his bigotry."

There are DREAMers, as they are called, who wish to serve their country but have been rejected when they attempted to enlist.

"It would be an honor for me to serve the country I call home, but every time I have tried to enlist, the recruiters told me to come back once I had addressed my 'status situation,'" said Ernesto Alvarez, who has been turned away several times when trying to enlist. He also participated in the action on September 20<sup>th</sup> which was followed by an all night vigil by DREAM supporters.

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## **DREAM, LGBT youth applaud Senate vote//2**

In addition to allowing dedicated youth to serve their country in the military, the DREAM Act would allow talented students to pursue careers upon graduating college.

“We educate these students, and then we can’t hire them. The current system represents a loss of talent for local business, not to mention the entire US labor force,” said leadership from the United Southwest Chamber of Commerce as they presented letters in support of the DREAM Act at Republican Headquarters today. “These students are highly skilled – in many cases, bilingual – and they’re not able to fully contribute their skills and their knowledge.”

Advocates call on Senators on both sides of the aisle to continue to champion the DREAM Act and the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and not allow partisan maneuvering to stand in the way of progress. The DREAM Act is already a stand-alone bill in the House (H.R. 1751) and Senate (S. 749), with a respective 128 and 40 co-sponsors in both parties.

“Don’t hold our DREAMs hostage,” said Tania Unzueta, one of the many activists who has been fighting for the DREAM Act to move forward this year, as well as one of the thousands of DREAMers whose future direction is being decided by congress this week.

“As a private citizen, a U.S. citizen, I care about how my Senators vote this week,” said Reyna Hernandez, a policy analyst with the Latino Policy Forum. “I am not undocumented, but I am DREAMer. The Senate is voting on our DREAM this week. I will be voting on theirs in November.”

Some of the many local organizations which have been supporting the DREAM Act and working on the DREAM Week of Action include:

- Call of Duty U.S.A.
- Chicago Community and Workers Rights
- Confemex
- Enlace Chicago
- Family Focus- Aurora
- Federacion Jaliscense del Medioeste (Fedejal)
- Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
- Immigrant Youth Justice League
- Latino Organization of the Southwest
- Latino Policy Forum
- Latinos Progresando
- Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities
- P.A.S.O.- West Suburban Action Project- Nuestra Voz
- Telpochcalli Community Education Project

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