

Pentagon says DREAM Act could boost ranks; Dems vow to reintroduce plan to offer immigrants residency

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Body

Immigration advocates have long pushed for the **DREAM Act** as a way to give children who were brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents a chance to become legal residents and have access to higher education.

The less publicized part of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors **Act** is that the **Pentagon** is pushing for it as a means to staff the armed forces.

Prospects dimmed Tuesday when Senate Republicans prevented a vote on a defense spending bill, because the **DREAM Act** was attached as an amendment. Senate Democrats **vowed** to **reintroduce** it.

When the Department of Defense published its three-year strategic **plan**, it listed the **DREAM Act** as a way it could replenish its **ranks**.

"If we needed to expand the pool of eligible youth, the (**DREAM**) initiative would be one of several ways to do it," spokeswoman Eileen Lainez **said** in an e-mail.

Retired Army lieutenant colonel Margaret Stock **says** a "crisis in military manpower" is looming as the population ages and the economy improves. She **says** the military struggled to recruit enough people when the economy was booming just a few years ago because people had more employment options.

"**DREAM** would give us the ability to tap into a huge number of people who grew up in the United States, were educated here, they talk like Americans, they look like Americans and their loyalty lies with America," **says** Stock, a former West Point professor who teaches political science at the University of Alaska-Anchorage.

The **act** would allow illegal **immigrants** who met several requirements -- 35 or younger, came to the U.S. before turning 16, have lived here at least five years, no criminal record and have earned a high school diploma -- to become conditional residents for up to six years. They would be eligible to become permanent residents if they completed two years of college or two years in the military.

The Migration Policy Institute, a non-partisan research group that supports an overhaul of immigration law, estimates that more than 725,000 people would be eligible immediately for conditional **residency**. An additional 1.4 million would meet all the requirements except the high school diploma.

The military part of the **act** worries Jorge Mariscal, director of Latino studies at the University of California-San Diego.

He **says** many illegal **immigrant** families are too poor to pay for college.

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"Our concern is that people are just going to get trapped for economic reasons into the military," **says** Mariscal, who otherwise supports the **DREAM Act**.

Roy Beck, executive director of NumbersUSA, which advocates lower levels of legal and illegal immigration, opposes the **DREAM Act** because it does not address the larger problems of illegal immigration.

Felipe Matos would be glad to join the military under the **DREAM Act**.

Born to a single mother in the slums of Brazil, he came to live with relatives in the U.S. at 14. He graduated from high school, got an associate's degree at Miami Dade College and hopes to get a four-year degree and become a high school teacher. He **says** he wants to repay the country that gave him the opportunity to succeed.

"I have friends who would have loved to join the military," **says** Matos, 24. "I feel that all of us are just trying to serve and contribute to the only country we know and love."

Graphic

PHOTO, B/W

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