

ADS CRITICIZE TUITION BREAK FOR STATE'S ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

PROPOSAL WOULD ALLOW SOME TO PAY IN-STATE RATE

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Body

MILWAUKEE -- The battle over immigration issues is heating up in Wisconsin as lawmakers consider a proposal to let illegal immigrants who graduate from state high schools pay in-state tuition to attend public colleges and universities.

Nine states, including several southern border states, have passed similar legislation allowing illegal immigrants to avoid paying costly out-of-state rates.

Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle proposed the change as part of his two-year state budget. The proposal is due for debate by the Republican-controlled Joint Finance Committee -- just as a conservative group has launched television ads slamming the plan.

The Coalition for America's Families said tuition breaks shouldn't be a priority as Wisconsin copes with a \$1.6 billion budget deficit. Its 30-second spots, airing in Milwaukee, Madison and Green Bay, have a Hispanic woman presenting the group's side.

"We followed the rules. We became citizens," she says. "We work hard to save money so our daughter will be the first one in our family to go to college. We shouldn't have to pay more taxes to fund illegal aliens."

Coalition chairman Steve King of Milton said the ad dramatizes one of many complaints the group has about Doyle's budget and future ads will focus on others. He said there was no involvement of the Republican Party, despite the timing of the ad campaign.

Bills on immigrant tuition also are pending in Minnesota and Florida, and New Mexico recently passed legislation allowing the lower tuition for illegals, according to the National Immigration Law Center.

Supporters say the children of illegal immigrants shouldn't be punished for decisions their parents made. They say many bright, successful young Hispanics who grow up in America end up working in low-paying service jobs when they could be professionals and serve as leaders.

"The talent is there, the potential is there, but because of their economic status they can't go to college without financial aid, which they can't get without papers," said Rep. Pedro Colon, a Milwaukee Democrat whose south side district is heavily Hispanic. "We are squandering human potential here."

He said he often hears from upset teachers and graduates -- including the valedictorians of the largest public high school in his district -- who can't afford the high out-of-state tuition, which he said is about \$12,000 a year more at UW-Madison.

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Wisconsin's **proposal** would let **illegal immigrants** pay **in-state tuition rates** at UW System schools if:

- They graduated from a Wisconsin high school.
- They have been **in** the **state** for at least a year after their first day of high school.
- They give the university an affidavit that they will apply for permanent visas or citizenship as soon as they are entitled to do so.

Melanie Fonder, a Doyle spokeswoman, said the students would have to go through the same application process as other potential students.

In the U.S. Senate, Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, is expected to reintroduce a bill next session that would give **illegal immigrants** who are graduates legal status for six years if they came to the United **States** as a child and have been here at least five years. They could apply for permanent status if they complete two years of postsecondary education or military service.

Maria Monreal-Cameron, president of Wisconsin's Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, said many **illegal immigrants** show their commitment to America by serving **in** the military and should be offered the same opportunities as their U.S.-born peers.

"They have lived **in** the shadows for all of their young lives," Cameron said. "We need to have them **in** place so that those of us who are **in** leadership roles now will be able to turn that torch over to a new generation."

Notes

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