



UNDOCUMENTED AND UNAFRAID

A Napan's Fight for a DREAM

-By Sarahid Rivera Vázquez

Despite the ongoing promises of a policy change and as the lack of reform enactment continues into late 2010, focus has been shifted to a desperately needed "legal path" to citizenship for undocumented students across the nation. The ***DREAM Act** has, for several years now, been presented and introduced both as a lone bill and part of the comprehensive immigration reform. For almost a decade now, no law or policy has been implemented to provide a just opportunity to the children who, through no fault of their own, find themselves "illegally" in the country. Children and young adults, who face the daily requirements to study, work and must live in the shadows of our America. Unfortunately, like many, Laura Lopez from Napa Valley is at the mercy of the strict and severely broken immigration system that continues to "punish" her for an act she had no power over.

Laura and her family entered the U.S. "without inspection" when she was only one year old. Although her parents ultimately obtained Permanent Residency in 2004, Laura's approved petition remains in the endless sea of the backlogged visa system.

CAUGHT UP IN THE BACKLOG

The U.S. Department of State is now processing or "accepting" applications for 1992 petitions or earlier. Based on calculations by various immigration attorneys, Laura is looking at a "**16 to 18 year wait**" until she can work and assimilate to society.

Many undocumented students understandably cannot overcome the barriers presented by college enrollment restrictions, out of state tuition fees, lack of financial aid, grant and scholarship denials and even at times, educators' discrimination. It's unimaginable how Laura persevered, continued and obtained her B.A. in Latin American and Latino Studies, Emphasis on Immigration, Cum Laude from the University of

California, Santa Cruz.

Now, when other recent college grads begin their careers and rightfully apply their degrees, Laura is forbidden to do so. Laura has been denied the ability to contribute to her own community.

Throughout the years, Laura's undocumented status has placed barriers along her way, but her accomplishments have surpassed those obstacles. The reason: Laura has refused to live in constant fear of deportation to a country she not been to since infancy, abandon her path to law school and succumb to a pause in plans due to recent political deadlock on the issue.

But as the possibility of a Comprehensive Immigration Reform stalled, and the morally conscientious law makers shifted to address the DREAM Act, the timid Napan took the lobbying in her own hands and her story on the road. Partnering with advocacy groups, immigration attorneys and The DREAM is Coming of L.A., Laura joined on the "freedom ride" caravan from L.A. to D.C. on a journey that could possibly end in deportation.

THE QUEST

On July 9, 2010 the former Vintage High student began her epic week of action and empowerment which included: lobby visits at Senators Reed, Ensign, Bennet, Boxer, Feinstein, Nelson, Johanns and former sponsor Hatch's offices. Laura participated in a press conference in Lincoln, Nebraska at the state capitol, and later held a second conference with DREAMers from Immigrant Youth Justice League of Chicago, Illinois. On July 20, 2010 Laura demonstrated in what has been called "*the first civil disobedience action carried out by undocumented activists.*" This historic event took

***About the DREAM Act:** It is estimated that over 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high schools every year. For many of them, it's the conclusion to their educational career. The DREAM Act will grant youth who traveled to the United States before the age of 16 and graduated from high school with a conditional legal status after a 2 year college degree or service with the U.S. military. (More information on the DREAM Act: www.dreamactivist.org, www.dreamact.info, www.nilc.org, www.dreamact.com)

place at Capitol Hill's Hart Building in an effort to attract attention, but more than anything, Congress support for the DREAM Act.

Laura was arrested that evening and has been charged for "trespassing." It was an arrest which she was both, mentally and legally prepared for, but may still ultimately end in deportation as her criminal proceedings continue in Washington, D.C.

The following day, Laura met with the author of the house bill, Congressman Burman, followed by a trip to Urbana-Champagne, where she presented to the United Steelworkers in the Civil Rights class. Then arrived at Denver, Colorado on the 23rd where she met with a supportive organization called Padres y Jovenes Unidos. Later returned to California in support of fellow student hunger-strikers (some already on their 6th day) in Los Angeles.

DREAM WORTH THE RISK

So why would a promising young woman subject herself to arrest and possible deportation? Because Laura, along with millions of other undocumented students across our nation, seek justice, nothing less than the American tradition millions have come here to acquire. The brave endure the unjust consequences of lobbying for policy change with willingness to lose it all, which, in Laura's case, means a swift "order of removal" by an immigration judge. Yet Laura, in taking risks by confronting lawmakers for legislative change, is more patriotic than politicians who are not willing to ensue that the youth of this country meets it's fullest potential, and not just that of a dream.



"Laura Lopez, from Napa, CA was among the 21 DREAMers who drew national attention after a civil disobedience in Capital Hill's Hart Building on July 20, 2010."

For media contact, interviews & more info. on the DREAM Act e-mail: sarahidr@gmail.com
FOLLOW LAURA ON FACEBOOK:
www.facebook.com/pages/Help-Laura-Lopez-to-reach-her-DREAM/139189579439741

Read more on Laura's journey:

The Huffington Post

"... Laura realizes that without legislative action, her dreams will inevitably fall short of becoming reality..." http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bruce-lesley/their-idream-can-wait-no_b_659960.html

Technorati Politics

"In an attempt to bring their plight to the attention of mainstream America, the students participated in an act of peaceful civil disobedience, including a charismatic youth named Laura Lopez." <http://technorati.com/politics/article/dream-activists-students-arrested-in-dc/>

The Dream is Coming

"I will not wait another 20 years for my petition to be reviewed by a judge." Laura Lopez, from California. <http://www.thedreamiscoming.com/2010/07/20/press-conference-announced-for-tomorrow/>

Citizen Orange

"DREAMers are among the most patriotic people I know, they grow up believing the story of inclusion and opportunity they are taught here from infancy." <http://www.citizenorange.com/orange/2010/07/dream-act-21-arrested-on-capitol.html>

89.3 KPCC Southern California Public Radio

"Lopez comes from a family of seven. Four are citizens, two are legal residents. She's the only one who's undocumented. Lopez — a recent graduate of UC Santa Cruz — wants to be a lawyer." <http://www.scp.org/news/2010/07/21/undocumented-grad-risks-deportation/>

L.A. ist

"...Representing California was Laura Lopez, a graduate..." http://laist.com/2010/07/20/dream_act_protestors_take_to_senate.php

The Reader.com

Caravan spokesperson Laura Lopez told *The Reader* that the bill would help a lot of people she knew." http://thereader.com/news.php?subaction=showfull&id=1279838940&archive=&st art_from=&ucat=6&

Support Laura & DREAMers alike:

1. Sign the petition TODAY:

http://org2.democracynotion.org/o/5713/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=3111

2. Call your congressman: (202) 224- 3121

3. Donate: Due to "trespassing" charges following the civil demonstration, Laura is attending trials in D.C. Donations towards airfare & lodging appreciated! <http://lauraofcalifornia.chipin.com>

The DREAM Act is a great return on money we have already invested.

Students who would benefit under the DREAM Act have been raised and educated in the U.S. State and local taxpayers have already invested in the education of these children in elementary and secondary school and deserve to get a return on their investment. - National Immigration Law Center

Laura (far right) with fellow DREAMers at Senator Reid's office, day of her arrest.

