

OPINION

Corporate Sponsors of a Reckless Agenda

Group should redress the harm it caused

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Last month, the civil rights community and Americans of conscience won a major victory against the corporately funded conservative policy group that supported the "Stand Your Ground" law responsible for delaying the arrest of Trayvon Martin's killer. This same group is behind dozens of voter ID laws, which are jeopardizing the voting rights of millions of Americans.

After an exodus of major corporate sponsors, prompted by pressure from a coalition of progressive and civil rights organizations, including the National



Urban League, the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) officially ended its involvement in these issues, saying in part, "We are eliminating the ALEC public safety and elections task force that dealt with non economic issues."

Corporate support, which ranges from \$7,000 to \$25,000 in annual dues to the organization, began to wither in the wake of the public outcry against Florida's Stand Your Ground law, which shields a gunman from prosecution simply by claiming a suspicion that his or her life was in danger. George Zimmerman made that claim to Sanford, Fla. police officers who incredulously did not arrest him following the Feb. 26 shooting death of the unarmed, 17-year-old Martin.

While presenting itself as an organization that promotes legislation which serves the financial interests of its corporate funders, ALEC has used its close ties to conservative state legislators to sponsor

similar "Kill at Will" laws in 30 states—and the tragic body count is growing. In Florida alone, since the law was passed in 2005, that state's "justifiable homicide" rate has jumped 300 percent.

The organization has also supported dozens of unnecessary voter ID laws across the country that may keep as many as five million citizens from exercising their right to vote in this all important election year.

In rallies, letters, and social media outreach, the civil rights community reminded ALEC's corporate sponsors, including Coca-Cola, McDonald's, PepsiCo and Kraft, that significant numbers of consumers found their association with the organization's extreme agenda offensive. When a growing number of businesses began severing their ties with ALEC, the group backed away from supporting these "non economic" issues. But we urge ALEC to go one step further.

Now that ALEC has acknowledged

that its activities led it far beyond the bounds of reasonable commercial legislative activity, we call upon the group to devote its considerable resources to redress the harms caused by the "Public Safety and Elections" task force—dangerous policies that armed civilian vigilantes and disenfranchised seniors, people of color, and the disabled by the millions.

The full impact of these measures has only begun to be felt. For example, laws that restrict voting access are still in the pipeline in many states.

A simple disavowal of its misguided activities will be insufficient to correct the damage that has already been caused. We call upon the American Legislative Exchange Council to actively support our "Occupy the Vote" campaign to repeal these onerous laws.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

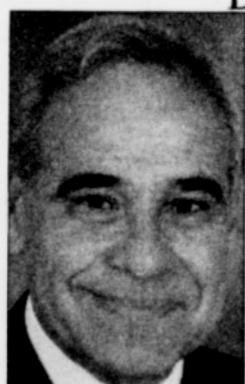
Citizenship for Hard Working Young People

DREAM Act keeps faith with our values

BY REP. CHARLES GONZALEZ

The proudest claim anyone can make is that they are a citizen of this great country. Citizenship commands duties and responsibilities freely assumed by those who love and cherish the United States. Citizenship inspires and enables us to make our own unique contribution and is at the core of the American dream.

The original DREAM Act is a bipartisan plan that ensures undocumented children will not be relegated to underclass status. It allows law-abiding, hard-working young people to continue contributing to their adopted homeland and earn citizenship. The DREAM Act permits children who violated no law when they



were brought to the U.S. to attain their full potential and enhance American society.

Democrats worked with Republicans to incorporate their ideas and made 11 significant changes to the bill. In fact, Republican Senator Orrin Hatch from Utah was one of the lawmakers who introduced the bill. It took nine years to get a vote on the floors of the House and Senate and though that is a long time, we did not give up. And we will not give up now.

In addition to our partners in both parties, the diverse DREAM student community had a major impact on getting the bill to the floor. Every step of the way, DREAMers were there to show the world how important this legislation is for the economy and for the preservation of American ideals. Hearing from DREAMers was important for legislators in the Congressional Hispanic Cau-

cus and as we continue to work toward passing this bill, we want to continue hearing from them.

Earning citizenship is essential because mere legal residency will serve only as a life sentence to being relegated to an underclass status. It is against the values of our country to ask DREAMers to work hard, pay taxes and sacrifice their lives for our country, but deny them citizenship. It is also contrary to the long-established legal principle that you don't punish children for the acts of a parent.

Any legislation that does not allow a pathway to citizenship is not worthy of being connected to the DREAM Act. When it comes to immigration reform, it has been argued that 'something is better than nothing,' but is it really something if it guarantees a lifelong block to equality? The DREAM Act is not dead, but it must be resuscitated with bipartisan support.

It is unacceptable to keep a group of

young people in a state of uncertainty and to restrict their ability to assimilate and become fully vested in this great country. The American people appear to agree. According to a poll conducted by Fox News in December, 66 percent of all registered voters supported a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who paid taxes, learned English and had no criminal background.

For the future of our country and our economic well-being, and in keeping with our nation's proudest tradition of fairness and justice, let's pass the DREAM Act with the bipartisan support it deserves. Let's give young people the chance to someday raise their right hands and take an oath of devotion and allegiance to the only country they have ever known and loved. Anything less will be a dream unfulfilled for the students and our nation.

Rep. Charles Gonzalez is chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

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