

For Immediate Release
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Gleeful Contempt of Our Students Shameful

In the weeks since An Act Relative to In-State Tuition Rates and Fees at Public Higher Education Facilities (S764/H1230) was defeated, my office has received a steady stream of phone calls, e-mails and letters in regards to that highly publicized bill. While I am grateful to the numerous people who contacted me and thanked me for supporting it, I would like to respond to those who opposed the bill and celebrated its defeat.

Your celebration is misguided, your cause shortsighted and your gleeful contempt for the people affected by this legislation startling.

The defeat of this bill did nothing to stem the tide of undocumented immigrants to this country. It did nothing to safeguard American jobs from foreign competition. It did nothing to safeguard America against terrorism. But it did deny several hundred young people the chance to pay \$9,000 a year to attend a Massachusetts public university. Congratulations, you have certainly sent a powerful message to the nefarious bands of undocumented immigrants graduating at the top of their classes in our high schools.

In denying these young people an affordable higher education option, the opponents of this bill have helped to continue the cycle of poverty that often grips immigrant communities. These children are, in many ways, the future of their communities, the future of our commonwealth. Many of the students who visited the State House during the debate over this bill had already been accepted at public universities throughout the state. They had done the work and were simply looking to pay \$9,000 a year to attend college in Massachusetts. The initial group of approximately 400 students would have generated well over \$1 million in tuition payments had they been given the chance to pay an affordable tuition rate.

Unfortunately, many of those students will now be unable to afford the \$18,000 out-of-state tuition rate and will not attend college. It is ironic that one of the main complaints of opponents of this bill was that they felt it was wrong to subsidize undocumented immigrants. Sadly, few opponents spent the time to realize that by denying these students an affordable higher education, they were, in fact, virtually guaranteeing that they would remain marginally employable and heavily dependent on the state's resources. If you opposed this bill and felt strongly that the state should not provide affordable tuition rates for undocumented immigrants, think about this question: Would you be better served by a generation of employable, tax-paying, highly skilled college graduates, even if they were undocumented immigrants, or would you be better served by a generation of undocumented immigrants, unable to attend college, unable to find a job paying a living wage, forced to depend on the state for housing, human services and health care?

Instead of taking into account the long-term economic and social benefits for the commonwealth, many opponents of this bill were swayed by alarming claims that the undocumented students were "stealing" spots from Massachusetts citizens and that this bill would encourage more illegal

immigration.

The 400 students initially affected by this bill would not have meant any reduction in the number of citizen students accepted into the state's public education system. The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, the Massachusetts State College Presidents' Council and the Massachusetts Community College Presidents' Council all supported this bill and stated repeatedly that the in-state tuition bill would have no effect on the admissions prospects of qualified citizen applicants. Plus, these students would not be the first non-Massachusetts' citizens to get a financial break at our state colleges and universities. Students from the five other New England states pay only \$857 more than Massachusetts residents, so in essence your tax dollars are already being used to subsidize noncitizen students.

The claim that this bill would increase illegal immigration to the commonwealth is simply not realistic. Nine other states have already passed similar bills and none has seen a significant jump in illegal immigration as a result. Massachusetts' proposed three-year residency requirement makes the prospect of undocumented immigrants streaming to the state even more remote. We are a small state with a struggling economy far removed from the Central and South American borders. Why would undocumented immigrants bypass states such as California and Texas, both of which have in-state tuition laws (the University of Texas system actively recruits undocumented immigrant students), and flock to Massachusetts cities and towns? The assertion that this bill would increase illegal immigration is without any real merit.

However, the most alarming aspect of this debate for me was the lack of empathy displayed by the opponents of this bill. I received many e-mails, letters and phone calls from opponents with a common theme - "My ancestors came to this country legally and worked hard, if it was good enough for them, it's good enough for these people today."

First, I think that it would be wise to point out that the American government had no formal national immigration policy until 1882. Prior to that year, anyone, from anywhere, could move to America. There was only one requirement for nationalization: live here for two years. Any immigrant who lived in this country for two years was automatically awarded citizenship. Certainly, life was not easy for new immigrants, but the claim by many opponents that their ancestors came to this country "legally" is misleading. It was impossible to be an "illegal" immigrant in America prior to 1882.

Further, should we allow ourselves as a society in 2006 to be defined by the prejudice and ignorance of American society a century ago? Does the suffering of your ancestors justify the suffering of immigrants today? If opponents of this bill were so troubled by the treatment their ancestors received decades and centuries ago, one would reasonably expect them to empathize with the ordeal of immigrants today. Sadly, it seems that the opposite is true.

When I was growing up in East Cambridge, my entire neighborhood consisted of immigrants and the children of immigrants. All of my neighbors came from different parts of the world but they were our playmates and our friends and we all worked together to make each other's lives better. I hope that my district hasn't changed so much in 40 years that we now strive to make life tougher on our immigrants, that we now revel at their struggles and fail to see our heritage in

their hardships.

I am proud to have voted for the In-State Tuition Bill. It was the right thing to do and the best thing for all my constituents, regardless of when they or their ancestors came to this country.

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