

In Fog of War American Dream Passes By

Dream. Pass. Act.

An inside look at the thoughts running through the head of Indianapolis Colt's Quarterback Peyton Manning before the Super Bowl?

No, a recipe for Congress to win a war. Not the one being fought on the blood-stained streets of Iraq. The one we are losing right here at home.

Behind all the headlines about the partisan squabbles over the right course of action in Iraq are these sobering facts so far lost in the fog of war.

- Nearly half of all Latino ninth-graders never finish high school.
- Thousands who do can't go to college because they are the children of immigrants who came to this country illegally.

It doesn't matter that their parents pay taxes or have contributed to the U.S. economy for decades, often in low paying jobs that increase the profit margin for employers.

While Uncle Sam is only too happy to conscript immigrants with green cards for combat duty in Iraq, the legal children of immigrants cannot get government help to become highly educated productive citizens.

Two pieces of legislation – the Dream Act and the PASS Act – would help us to win this battle at home, but both have taken a back seat to the other war being fought in someone else's country in the name of Democracy.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray first introduced the PASS Act (Pathways for All Students to Succeed Act) nearly four years ago. Co-sponsored by Sens. Hillary Clinton, Ted Kennedy and Richard Durbin, its ammunition includes increased funding for literacy and math coaches, career and academic counselors and grants to fund innovation in education.

The futures of over 6 million U.S. children on the borderline between academic success and failure are at stake.

In 2004, U.S. Rep. Bob Menendez, D.-N.J., launched a nationwide effort along with other Democrats and Hispanic political and business leaders. It was called “Graduation for All: A Right & a Responsibility.

“We need to make it clear that the Hispanic community will not tolerate a 50-50 chance that its young people will graduate high school, and an even lower chance they will make it to college,” Menendez said then.

Murray reintroduced the PASS Act in 2005. It has yet to be acted on.

The cost, \$4.5 billion, may be a reason. But that seems like chump change compared to the cost of the war in Iraq, which is estimated at over \$500 billion and could, according to some estimates, cost over a trillion dollars by the time all is said and done.

The Dream Act (the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act), likewise was reintroduced in 2005 by a bipartisan group of congressmen led by Durbin, an Illinois Democrat. It would remove some of the barriers to college for the children of illegal immigrants, including those barring them from in-state tuition rates, government grants and loans.

The bill, originally introduced in 2002 by Utah Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch, was lost in the swirl of controversy over immigration reform last year. Congress is again set to take up the immigration issue beginning in February, but the smart money may be on another delay.

Some politicians on both sides of the aisle want to save the debate for the presidential election race, where it can be used as fodder for political mudslinging that caters to the descendants of immigrants who don’t want to share this land with new immigrants.

In the meantime, a generation of children is growing up and dropping out of opportunity, creating a permanent underclass that will one day be called upon to support the rest of society, including the retired flag wavers who wanted to keep them down and out in the first place.

Dream. Pass. Act. It’s not just a game plan for the Superbowl. It’s the only battle plan Congress should agree on if it wants to win the war we are losing at home.