Leveraging the Moment: 
Talking About President Obama’s DREAM Announcement

June 15, 2012

Today’s announcement that the Obama Administration will no longer deport students and young people who came to the country as children is a major victory for equality and justice. The celebrations are long-awaited and well-deserved. But of course, we still have much to do. This memo contains messaging guidance about leveraging this media moment to highlight the next steps our policymakers must take to get our immigration policies on the right track, and aligned with American values.

**Main Messaging Themes**

- This decision is a long time coming, is important to upholding our core values of fairness and opportunity, and is the right direction for these young people and for our nation.
- But it’s not enough. Our policymakers need to:
  - Halt the deportation of other immigrants who are getting caught up in draconian policing measures and denied a day in court;
  - Stop enacting state laws that marginalize and exclude these young people, their families, and millions of other immigrants who just want to contribute and participate; and
  - Create a reasonable immigration process for these aspiring citizens and millions of other immigrant Americans who want to contribute and participate in this country.
- Our communities need more commonsense approaches like the decision the president announced today, policies that move us forward together rather than exclude and divide.

**Sample Messages:**

*We applaud President Obama’s decision today to move toward a reasoned solution to our flawed immigration policies. By announcing that his administration will stop deporting young people who have been here since childhood but lack immigration papers, the president sends a clear message that we can take reasoned, commonsense approaches to the issue of undocumented immigration. We can find ways to encourage contribution, rather than elicit fear. We can find solutions that move us forward together, rather than look for more ways to divide and separate. And most importantly, we can craft policies that uphold the values this country holds dear — opportunity, community, family, and fairness — rather than surrender to our worst instincts, as too many states have done.*
This decision should set the stage for reasoned discussions about what we as a country need from our immigration policies. The president has acknowledged that we need a commonsense approach that upholds our values and moves us forward together. But the work is far from over. We need the president to halt the deportation of other immigrants who are getting caught up in draconian policing measures and denied a day in court. Most of these folks have roots in the communities, close family who are American citizens, and want only to be able to contribute to their adopted land. It’s not in our interest to spend resources detaining and deporting these aspiring citizens; it goes against common sense, and it goes against our values of fairness and decency.

Today, President Obama underscored an important truth: that it’s not about what you look like or where you were born that makes you American, it’s how you live your life and what you do that defines you here in this country. The young people affected by today’s decision represent this important idea. They are American in every way except their citizenship. They’ve grown up here, developed American values, and want to contribute to and participate in this country they call home. We look forward to the day when we have policies that let them realize their citizenship dreams.

The young people spared from deportation today are just one example of aspiring citizens across the country who need a clear pathway to citizenship. These immigrant Americans want to continue to contribute and participate in the country they call home. But they face obstacles, including deportation, in an inconsistent and incoherent set of immigration laws. We look forward to the president’s continued leadership on this issue, leadership that results in better immigration policies that serve us all.

President Obama has done the right thing today, sparing thousands of young people from deportation to lands they barely know. This decision is the kind of commonsense approach we need. But these aspiring citizens still face many barriers. Many immigrants live in states bent on excluding and marginalizing their families; many will see family members caught up in draconian policing measures and deported; and all of them still face the uncertainty of temporary status, not the full-fledged citizenship they dream of. Our policymakers have a choice: they can follow the president’s lead and enact commonsense immigration policies that encourage participation and contribution. Or they can give in to the narrow-minded politics of fear and exclusion exhibited by states like Arizona and Alabama.

This decision will be a boon to communities across the country in dire need of the revitalization, contributions and energy young people bring to sagging economies. The aspiring citizens who were spared deportation today are the future teachers, business owners, construction workers, and taxpayers in those communities. The prosperity of our communities, and our nation, depends
on our policymakers following the president’s lead and crafting more commonsense immigration policies.

Today, President Obama affirms what any New American throughout history could tell you: being American is about values, not paperwork. In telling young people across the country that we value their commitment to this country, their aspirations, their future here, the president sends a powerful message to these aspiring citizens, and to us all. Right now, our immigration policies don’t reflect our core values; they block millions from full participation and contribution, they separate families, they deport thousands of people who have lived here for years and have deep roots in their communities. Our policies are like this because Congress refuses to take up the task of changing these flawed immigration laws. We hope Congress hears the president’s message and provides a path to citizenship for these young immigrant Americans, and other aspiring citizens around the country.