

# The New York Times

## A 'DREAMER' ADDRESSES THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

By Julia Preston  
September 6, 2012

Benita Veliz was only at the lectern at the Democratic convention for a few minutes on Wednesday night. CNN did not even turn its cameras on the stage during her brief speech. But for many Latinos in the hall, her moment under the lights was a stunning surprise.

Ms. Veliz, 27, who is from San Antonio, is a leader of a group of young undocumented immigrants who call themselves Dreamers, because they would be eligible for legal status under a bill, long stalled in Congress, called the Dream Act. Her speech was the highest profile public appearance to date by an immigrant from that movement, and it was a measure of how young people have emerged from the shadows despite their illegal status.

Like Julian Castro, the mayor of San Antonio, a Latino who gave the convention's keynote address on Tuesday, Ms. Veliz narrated an immigration story.

"I was brought here as a child. I've been here ever since," she said. "I graduated as valedictorian of my class at the age of 16 and earned a double major at the age of 20. I know I have something to contribute to my economy and my country."

But Ms. Veliz's story had a catch: "I've had to live almost my entire life knowing I could be deported just because of the way I came here," she said.

She praised President Obama for an executive action he took in June to suspend the deportation of undocumented students and give them work permits. As many as 1.7 million young immigrants could be eligible, and in an interview after her speech, Ms. Veliz said she was one of them and was preparing her application.

Until recently Latinos were showing signs of disappointment with Mr. Obama, because he failed to keep a promise to pass an immigration overhaul and deported large numbers of immigrants. But to many Latino and immigrant advocates, Ms. Veliz's time on the stage was a sign that the Obama campaign will not shy away from the thorny issue of illegal immigration, but will work to rally Latino voters with pledges to pass the Dream Act in a second term.

"It was a sign of acceptance for Dreamers at the highest political levels that would have been unthinkable even three years ago," said Frank Sharry, executive director of America's Voice, which advocates for legislation to give legal status to illegal immigrants. "The president leaned in to the issue instead of steering clear of it, and it is putting a lot of pressure on Republicans who labeled these immigrants as criminals in their platform."

Not everyone in the Dreamer movement is so enthusiastic. On Tuesday, 10 undocumented immigrants were arrested as they blocked traffic near the convention center in protest. They came to Charlotte after a two-month journey on a bus from Phoenix to demand that Mr. Obama do more to help those immigrants gain a legal foothold in this country. They came straight to the Democratic convention without stopping at the Republican convention in Tampa, Fla., saying they held no hope for help from Republicans.

The Republicans said little on illegal immigration during their convention, since it has been divisive for them and statements by the candidates during the nominating fight distanced the party from Latino voters who could be a major factor in several swing states in November.

Dan Stein, the president of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group that favors many tough curbs on illegal immigration that Republicans have endorsed, said Ms. Veliz's appearance at the Democratic convention was "nothing more than a celebration of lawlessness."