

THE PRESIDENT: Let me talk about not only the DREAM Act but about immigration policy generally. And I want to thank -- Sheryl Sandberg actually participated in a discussion that we had yesterday, bringing together business leaders and government officials and faith leaders, a broad cross-section of Americans together to talk about how do we finally fix an immigration system that's fundamentally broken.

For those of you who aren't familiar, the DREAM Act is -- deals with a particular portion of the population, kids who were brought here when they were young by their parents; their parents might have come here illegally -- the kids didn't do anything. They were just doing what kids do, which is follow their parents. They've grown up as Americans. They went to school with us or with our kids. They think of themselves as Americans, but many of them still don't have a legal status.

And so what we've said is, especially for these young people who are our neighbors, our friends, our children's friends, if they are of good character and going to school or joining our military, they want to be part of the American family, why wouldn't we want to embrace them? Why wouldn't we want to make sure that -- (applause.) Why wouldn't we want to make sure that they're contributing to our future?

So that's the DREAM Act. But that's just a small part of a broader challenge that we have. Immigration in this country has always been complicated. The truth of the matter is that we are both a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws. Sometimes the laws haven't been fair. Sometimes the laws have been restrictive to certain ethnic groups. There have been quotas. Sometimes our immigration policies have been arbitrary and have been determined by whether industry at a particular time was willing to bring in workers on the cheap.

But what's undeniable is America is a nation of immigrants. That's our history and that's what makes us stronger. Because we've got ambitious people from all around the world who come here because they've got a new idea and they want to create the new big thing, or they just want a better future for their kids and their family, and that dynamism is part of what's propelled our progress and kept us young.

Now, I think most Americans understand that and most Americans agree with that. At the same time, I think most Americans feel there should be an orderly process to do it. People shouldn't just be coming here and cutting in front of the line, essentially, and staying without having gone through the proper channels.

So what we've said is let's fix the whole system. First of all, let's make the legal immigration system more fair than it is and more efficient than it is. And that includes, by the way, something I know that is of great concern here in Silicon Valley. If we've got smart people who want to come here and start businesses and are PhDs in math and science and computer science, why don't we want them to stay? (Applause.) I mean, why would we want to send them someplace else? (Applause.)

So those are potential job creators. Those are job generators. I think about somebody like an Andy Grove of Intel. We want more Andy Groves here in the United States. We don't want them starting companies -- we don't want them starting Intel in China or starting it in France. We want them starting it here.

So there's a lot that we can do for making sure that high-skilled immigrants who come here, study -- we've paid for their college degrees, we've given them scholarships, we've given them this training -- let's make sure that if they want to reinvest and make their future here in America that they can. So that's point number one.

But point number two is you also have a lot of unskilled workers who are now here who are living in the shadows. They're contributing to our economy in all sorts of ways. They're working in the agricultural sector. They are in restaurants, and they're in communities all across the country looking after children and helping to building America. But they're scared, and they feel as if they're locked out of their surroundings.

And what I've said is they did break the law; they came here -- they have to take responsibility for that. They should pay a fine. They should learn English. They should go to the back of the line so that they don't automatically get citizenship. But there should be a pathway for them to get legalized in our society so they don't fear for themselves or their families, so that families aren't separated.

At the same time, let's make sure we've got a secure border so that folks aren't wandering through the desert to get here. Let's make the legal immigration system more efficient and more effective so there aren't huge backlogs.

This is all part of what we call comprehensive immigration reform. And there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to achieve a system that is fair, is equitable, is an economic engine for America that helps the people who are already here get acculturated, and make sure that our laws aren't being broken but we're still true to our traditions.

But, as I mentioned to Sheryl yesterday, I can't solve this problem by myself. Nancy Pelosi is a big champion of this. The Democratic caucus in the House I think is prepared for -- a majority of them are prepared to advance comprehensive immigration reform. But we're going to have to have bipartisan support in order to make it happen. And all of you have to make sure your voices are heard, saying this is a priority, this is something important -- because if politicians don't hear from you, then it probably won't happen. I can't do it by myself. We're going to have to change the laws in Congress, but I'm confident we can make it happen. (Applause.)