



## **Directors take a subtle approach**

By **Elham Khatami**

Documentaries have taken an aggressive approach to making their case in recent years.

From Michael Moore yelling through a megaphone and confronting corporate executives to Morgan Spurlock purging McDonald's burgers in "Super Size Me," directors have put an exclamation point on their statements.

But a new documentary takes a more subtle approach.

The directors of "Marking Up the Dream" support their subject, a bipartisan proposal called the DREAM Act that would give illegal immigrants under the age of 18 a pathway to citizenship, but they shy away from confrontation.

The movie follows the bill through the mark-up, or editing, phase of the bill in 2003.

The directors show the sponsors, Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), their colleagues marking up the bill in committee, Congressional staffers and activists participating in rallies, protests and hunger strikes in support of the bill.

"For a general audience, often a more persuasive case is made more subtly," said Shari Robertson, who co-directed the film with her husband Michael Camerini.

Robertson and Camerini believe that knowledge, more so than opinion, empowers the masses to influence change.

"We've created a kind of handbook to the struggle for immigration reform. I think you'll understand better how to be an activist," Camerini said.

The DREAM Act would allow undocumented minors who were brought to the United States at a young age the opportunity to become citizens. These youth must be high school graduates in good moral standing who have lived in the United States continuously for at least five years and have been accepted to a two- or four-year institution of higher education.

Once these requirements are met, the student can apply for conditional status, which can last up to six years, and during this time must complete their college education or serve in the military.

The bill has its share of critics.

Bob Dane, communications director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, criticized the DREAM Act as "an amnesty plan disguised as an educational initiative."

"It gives higher education and financial aid to illegal immigrants at the expense of U.S. citizens," he said. "The cap and gown used to come with a diploma, not a green card."

Since the mark up, the DREAM Act passed the full Senate as part of the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006.

In October 2007, it fell short of the 60 votes necessary to continue with the debate of the bill. It was reintroduced in the House and Senate in March 2009. The bill has garnered 39 Senate co-sponsors and 119 House co-sponsors, as well as the support of President Obama.

"Marking up the Dream" is one of 12 films in the filmmakers' How Democracy Works Now series, which give viewers an inside look at a step of the political process.

The filmmakers said they "fell in love" with the idea that Congress could fix problems that hold great implications for so many people.

"There was a way of fixing America's immigration problem, but it required a compromise, it required business and labor sit down together and Democrats and Republicans to sit down together," said Camerini.

"We were amazed at how responsive Congressional offices were to calls from constituents," said Robertson. "We saw senators change their votes based on a few dozen phone calls."

Camerini added that citizens often do not realize their power when it comes to influencing Congress.

"The problem isn't with Congress, it's with the citizens. Congress and their staff are enormously responsive," he said. "If we as a society are resolved on a issue, the political process is capable of moving very fast."

"I think that's what we can offer," Robertson added. "These films – they really take you inside the process and give you an inside seat on why it is taking so long and I think that's valuable when you're planning strategy."

**Elham Khatami writes for Congressional Quarterly.**

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