Between Legislative Representation and Immigration Realities: An Interview with Senator Karina Ruiz

Interview conducted by Daniel Solís Martínez

November 10, 2026

Introduction

This interview with Senator Karina Ruiz examines her immigration status in the United States and the implications she says it has for fulfilling her legislative responsibilities in person in Mexico. Questions address her personal experience, the continuity of her work, accountability and proposals for consular protection, allowing readers to consider her responses directly and assess the issues raised.

Her current immigration status

1. Could you explain, to the extent you consider appropriate, your current immigration status in the United States and the legal or administrative circumstances that prevent you from travelling to Mexico?

On August 13, 2026, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) issued its decision in Matter of Delcarmen-Lara, changing the interpretation of travel undertaken with Advance Parole, an authorization that allows certain people without permanent resident status to leave the United States temporarily and request re-entry. Under this decision, the BIA determined that such travel also constitutes a departure from the country for the purposes of penalties associated with unlawful presence.

As a DREAMer and DACA recipient, I have held Advance Parole, which previously permitted temporary travel without, in itself, triggering the three- or ten-year bars associated with unlawful presence. However, the new decision reversed that interpretation and established that leaving the United States with this authorization may trigger those penalties, depending on the duration of unlawful presence and the circumstances of each case.

This change directly affects DREAMers who, like me, hold this document but must reconsider travelling abroad. In my case, the new interpretation prevents me from leaving the United States until I can resolve my permanent residency application. I must therefore remain in the country even though I hold an authorization that previously allowed me to travel and return.

2. What consequences could leaving the United States have for you at this time?

If I left the country now, I would no longer be able to re-enter. If I attempted to return, the ten-year bar would apply, leaving me unable to return to my children. I would have to wait in Mexico while my legalization process was resolved.

The human dimension of her experience

3. Beyond your responsibilities as a legislator, how are you experiencing this situation personally?

It has not been easy. On the one hand, the current administration’s policies have made navigating immigration procedures somewhat more difficult than before. On the other, there has been considerable negative speculation about me and about the responsibilities I hold in Mexico.

4. What uncertainties, difficulties or decisions have you faced, and which aspects of your experience do you believe the Mexican public still does not fully understand?

I want to make clear that I consider applying for residency a legitimate right; it is not a crime. I have built a life in this country. I face the same uncertainty as thousands of migrants. My process is the same as anyone else's; being a legislator gives me no special privilege. If I am not granted residency, I could be deported like any other migrant.

It has also been extremely difficult not to be physically present to fulfil all my responsibilities towards Mexicans abroad and in the Mexican Senate, because I cannot leave the country. Nevertheless, I have continued carrying out my legislative duties, and I hope to return in person soon. This is not merely about the obligations of the office, but about everything this representation means to the migrants who have placed their trust in me.

There is something else that people may not know, and I want to say it plainly: I am not using my position in the Senate to gain any advantage in my immigration proceedings. I am going through the same process as anyone else, and I have not stopped working.

Timeline of events and continuity of legislative work

5. When did your immigration circumstances begin to restrict your travel to Mexico?

From August 20, when I was preparing to resume my legislative duties in Mexico. From that point onward, I avoided leaving the country until I had a clearer understanding of the situation.

6. When and how did you inform the Senate authorities, and what legislative activities have you been able to undertake during this period to continue fulfilling your representative responsibilities?

Once I had a clearer understanding of the issue, I contacted Senator Ignacio Mier, the coordinator of the Morena parliamentary group, to which I belong, to explain my situation and why I could not attend in person at the beginning of the legislative session.

I have introduced legislative proposals, attended committee meetings virtually and followed plenary proceedings remotely, although I have been unable to vote on the Senate floor because voting requires physical attendance.

Institutional responsibility, transparency and accountability

7. In light of public questions about your physical absence, the procedural grounds for it and the remuneration attached to your office, what information do you believe needs to be clarified?

I do not want to miss the opportunity to clarify something that has been raised publicly about me. It is false that I abandoned my responsibilities to pursue US citizenship. That is a lie. I could not become a citizen without first regularizing my immigration status by obtaining permanent residency. Over the past 27 years, I have built virtually my entire life in this country, having migrated here at the age of 15. Now that I have a family, I want to continue spending time with my children and grandchildren. This is not a crime; it is a process many migrants undertake so that they can remain with their families.

I say this because I have been accused of abandoning those I represent in the Mexican Senate in order to seek citizenship. I am fully aware of the commitment I made to Mexicans living abroad, and no one is more eager than I am to return and continue working for our community. I hope people can understand that resolving my immigration status is also a personal and family necessity, without implying that I am relinquishing my responsibilities towards them.

8. What institutional alternatives have been considered, including remote participation, a leave of absence or the involvement of your alternate, to ensure continuity of parliamentary representation?

I want to explain that alternatives were explored, but they would require substantial changes to the Senate's rules. That is not feasible at present, as it would take time. What I have done is participate in accordance with the existing rules: I take part in activities that can be conducted remotely, such as committee meetings, and follow Senate proceedings. Likewise, when important legislative votes have been required, I have requested leave so as not to obstruct the work, because I firmly believe that our efforts must serve the interests of our migrant community.

Her experience representing Mexicans abroad

9. You have firsthand knowledge of the difficulties migrants may face. How has your experience shaped your political commitment, and which obstacles do you consider particularly serious for Mexicans living in the United States, especially those whose immigration status is vulnerable or uncertain?

As an activist, I have spent more than 20 years fighting for our community's rights. When I entered the Senate, I saw that there was no agenda fully addressing the needs of those of us living abroad. My commitment has therefore been, and will remain, to keep migrants at the centre of attention, because we too are part of Mexico. Without doubt, the greatest obstacle is immigration status. That is not strictly a problem created by our country of origin, but by the country to which we migrate. It is precisely this situation that has prevented me from fully performing my duties as a senator.

The realities of migrants without a public voice

10. Your position as a senator has drawn attention to an immigration difficulty that others may also experience, albeit under very different circumstances. What does your experience reveal about people who lack political representation, financial resources, legal advice or opportunities to explain their difficulties publicly?

For years, we DREAMers have lived in a difficult situation. Through DACA, we obtained a degree of "protection" that allows us to work and obtain a driver's licence. At the same time, we have had to contend with efforts by different administrations across the country to eliminate or restrict the programme. Yet the present situation is even more difficult for all DREAMers, particularly those who cannot afford legal advice from an attorney.

I would also like to say that, despite being a senator of the Republic, I am experiencing this situation just as others in my community are. I do not use my political position for personal advantage. On the contrary, like hundreds of DREAMers, I have approached the consulate for legal guidance. I therefore encourage DREAMers to visit their nearest consulate and request legal advice and assistance, so that they have more resources with which to face our current circumstances.

11. Which human realities do you believe remain invisible in debates about immigration and border security?

When we discuss immigration and border security, the debate often focuses on political decisions and enforcement measures, while overlooking the needs, difficulties and contributions of our migrant community. One example is Arizona, where tuition fees for undocumented students tripled in 2006, forcing many young people, including me, to interrupt or abandon their studies. Another is the lack of access to healthcare: some migrants receive treatment only when their conditions have become very serious, even though preventive services could have helped them protect their health earlier.

Another rarely discussed reality concerns traffic violations which, depending on the circumstances and how the authorities classify them, may lead to immigration proceedings and even family separation. In other words, what might be resolved by paying a fine for a citizen can, for a migrant, jeopardize the right to remain in the country and

ultimately result in deportation. These are only a few of the many realities often excluded from immigration debates. I believe they should be central to any discussion of migration, because behind every decision we forget everything migrants have contributed to this country.

Protection of rights and concrete institutional proposals

12. Drawing on your experience, what specific measures do you consider priorities for improving consular protection, access to legal advice and the defence of the rights of Mexicans living abroad?

In my representative role, I have consistently conveyed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the concerns shared with me by Mexicans abroad, with the aim of improving consular protection, access to legal advice and the defence of their rights.

In concrete terms, we must continue strengthening consular assistance and protection. As President Claudia Sheinbaum has said, this means maintaining open-door consulates and consuls who work in the field, visiting detention centres where Mexican nationals are held. We must also strengthen the External Legal Assistance Programme (PALE) to provide legal advice and representation to compatriots who need it.

Mexicans abroad should know that they are not alone: the Mexican presidency has placed the country's consular network at their service for assistance and protection.

13. What initiatives have you advanced, or do you intend to pursue, in your legislative role, and what lessons might help protect migrants in other regions of the world?

As a migrant senator, most of the legislative initiatives and resolutions I introduce focus specifically on migrants. Given my own migration experience and the situation I am currently facing, I believe it is essential to work so that Mexican migrants—whether repatriated, returning voluntarily or living abroad—as well as migrants of other nationalities passing through Mexico are recognized as agents of change and do not have to endure what I am enduring.

Among the legislative initiatives and resolutions I have promoted are:

• A draft decree amending and supplementing various provisions of the Mexican Foreign Service Act: it would provide for public servants with migration experience to work in Mexican consulates; establish the category of "Vulnerable Mexican Migrant" for Mexicans living abroad with irregular immigration status; and require all consular staff to undertake training in human rights, gender awareness and sensitivity in consular services, to ensure dignified and inclusive treatment.

• A draft decree amending the title of Chapter V and Articles 81, 82 and 83 of the General Population Law: it would distinguish repatriated persons, meaning Mexicans who return involuntarily, from returnees, meaning those who return voluntarily, so that the law can recognize the distinction accurately and provide appropriate support. It would also empower the Ministry of the Interior to institutionalize a dignified and appropriate reception strategy for both groups, drawing on the "México te Abraza" initiative implemented by our government, and thereby ensure continuity regardless of which administration is in office.

• A resolution urging the Ministry of the Interior and the National Migration Institute to ensure prompt issuance of the Visitor Card for Humanitarian Reasons (TVRH) to people seeking refugee status, asylum or complementary protection in Mexico, in order to safeguard their rights to identity, mobility and international protection.

• A resolution urging the Ministry of Public Education, state education authorities and public and private educational institutions to adapt their rules and administrative procedures for school enrolment and records, making it easier for children and adolescents experiencing mobility to enter, remain in and obtain certification from the education system, thereby safeguarding their right to education.

These legislative measures reflect a clear principle: migration must always be approached from a human perspective. This conviction has guided my political work. Every country may have its own immigration laws, and that is legitimate, but respect for human rights must never be set aside, because I firmly believe that no human being is illegal.

Her message to citizens and migrant communities

14. Finally, what would you like to say to citizens who question your absences, to those who recognize the difficulties you face and, especially, to migrants living with similar uncertainty?

I am not asking people to take my side, but I hope they can understand that resolving my immigration status is also a personal and family necessity, without implying that I am abandoning my responsibility towards the Mexicans abroad whom I represent.

To migrants and DREAMers, I want to say that holding political office does not make me different. I am facing the same difficulties, so you have an ally in me, and I will gladly help however I can.

Is there any aspect of your experience, legislative work or published reports that you consider essential to clarify and that we have not addressed in these questions?

I want to emphasize that my immigration status and my current inability to leave the United States should not be the focus of the conversation. What truly matters is making visible the experiences of the hundreds of thousands of DREAMers who, like me, face this same restriction, even though everyone's circumstances differ. Behind this reality are people who have been unable to say a final goodbye to a sick relative, reunite with loved ones after many years, or accept educational and employment opportunities because doing so would require them to leave the country. Those stories, lost opportunities and separated families deserve to be at the centre of public debate and media coverage, rather than the circumstances of a migrant senator.

These are precisely the situations that have driven me, in my role as senator, to work—and continue working—towards better opportunities in our Mexico, especially for young people, so that no one is forced to migrate in order to build a dignified future. I also work to ensure that those who return, voluntarily or involuntarily, find a country that welcomes them with dignity and opportunity, and that those who choose Mexico as their destination find a welcoming society in which they can live with dignity.

Conclusion

Senator Karina Ruiz's responses set out her account of the immigration difficulties she faces and of her representative work. Readers may draw their own conclusions about her statements and the institutional and human questions they raise.