

News

Plight of Haitians, Salvadorans Lost in DACA Debate

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WASHINGTON — Rony Ponthieux's view of the future changes by the day.

A Haitian immigrant living in Miami, Ponthieux has been working in the United States under the Temporary Protected Status, TPS, provision since 2010, when he, his wife and two children, then 3 and 10, left Haiti in the wake of the island's devastating earthquake. Receiving it, he said, was "a miracle for my family."

Ponthieux now works as a nurse and hopes to eventually become a nurse practitioner. But the future changed last year for him and more than 250,000 Haitians and Salvadorans when President Trump decided to end the TPS that had been in place under former president's George Bush and Barack Obama. Now, he and the others have until next year to get permanent status or leave.

"Before [the revocation of his TPS], I was able to work, to go to school, to

take care of my family," Ponthieux said, "and I was okay with that."

It is unclear, he said, what he will do if Congress doesn't create a way for him and his family to stay in the United States, but he's not giving up.

"We're still fighting," he said, "I'm fighting. I feel that something will happen."

As Congress and America continue to debate the plight of 700,000 children brought to the country as infants by their parents, so-called "Dreamers," lost in conversation is the fate of about 50,000 Haitians and 200,000 Salvadorans were allowed to enter the U.S. temporarily after their countries were devastated by earthquakes in 2010 and 2001. They will have until September 2019 to gain legal immigrant status or be arrested and deported.

Currently, a handful of representatives have proposed bipartisan legislation that would grant permanent legal residency to TPS migrants from Haiti, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras.

Their bill would grant

qualified migrants the option of adjusting their legal status from temporary to legal permanent resident if they received TPS status prior to January 2011.

The bill is backed by Republican representatives Carlos Curbelo and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Democratic representatives Frederica Wilson and Alcee Hastings. All represent districts in central and south Florida with large Haitian and Salvadoran populations.

Wilson wrote a series of tweets pointing out what she said are the consequences of ending TPS for some.

"The reality is that in six months, Haiti will still be in no position to absorb and aid 58,000 unemployed people," Wilson wrote. "It will still be recovering from the 2010 earthquake and the subsequent cholera epidemic imported by U.N. peacekeepers that has killed 10,000."

Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Baltimore), represents a district with nearly 300,000 Salvadoran migrants. He echoed Wilson's sentiment.

"Rather than destroy



Haitians who came to the United States after a 2010 earthquake ravaged the country had their Temporary Protected Status revoked by the Trump Administration. They have until September 2019 to gain legal status, leave voluntarily or be arrested and deported.

the lives of families who have found refuge here from natural disasters and economic despair, the Trump Administration should act to ensure that individuals on TPS can continue to work and support themselves and their families and contribute both to the United States and to the reconstruction of their home countries," Cummings said in a statement after the initial White House announcement.

Marlene Bastien, executive director of the migrant advocacy group

Haitian Women of Miami, said her office has been receiving calls from families who are unsure of their next steps. Bastien said the revocation has left her "shocked and concerned."

"We realized that the termination wasn't based on the rules and the facts on the ground, but probably on race," she said. "Immigration, after all, is a racial issue."

After the White House's initial decision to terminate TPS provisions in last November and Trump's "sh*thole

countries" comment in January in reference to Haiti and African nations, organizers in Miami and the District of Columbia — two cities with large Haitian and El Salvadoran populations — have held a number of protests.

They have also made several trips to Washington, hoping to galvanize lawmakers who, according to Bastien, "lack courage" when it comes to acting on immigration legislation.

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