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Immigration

Ending Haitians' Protected Status Could Cost U.S. \$280M

The U.S. could lose some \$280 million in contributions to its gross domestic product by ending a program giving legal status and work permits to Haitians, according to the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

There were 58,706 Haitians in the U.S. with temporary protected status at the end of 2016. TPS allows people to continue living and working in the U.S. as long as the status is in effect. The Department of Homeland Security first designated Haiti for the program in 2010 after the country was hit by a major earthquake. TPS was last extended in 2015.

But James McCament, the acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, has recommended that TPS not be extended once it expires in July. Conditions have improved to the extent that TPS is no longer necessary, McCament said in an April 10 memorandum. Damage from Hurricane Matthew in October 2016 "did not halt Haiti's overall recovery trajectory," he said.

The ultimate decision belongs to DHS Secretary John Kelly, who has yet to act. A DHS spokeswoman told Bloomberg BNA May 16 that Kelly hasn't made a decision.

Kelly has until May 23, 60 days before the July 22 expiration of the current TPS extension.

'Uptick in Attention' Since McCament's memo became public, there's been a "significant uptick in attention to the issue," said Tom Jawetz, vice president of immigration policy at the Center for American Progress. The progressive organization is one of several groups pushing the DHS to renew TPS.

That includes Cities for Action, a coalition of more than 150 mayors and municipal leaders advocating for an overhaul of the immigration system. The coalition has taken a "multifaceted approach" to the issue, Nishi Agarwal, commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, told Bloomberg BNA May 16. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio (D) is one of the leaders of Cities for Action.

Protests and rallies, community actions, and social media campaigns are all on the menu, she said. About a dozen mayors from around the country also have signed on to a letter asking Kelly to extend TPS for Haiti, she said.

Haitians have a "huge impact on our country that is positive," Agarwal said.

Florida, New York, Massachusetts Affected The Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, Fla. metropolitan area stands to lose the most from a failure to renew TPS, being home to about 16,287 Haitians on TPS, according to an April report from the ILRC. The New York-Newark, N.J.-Jersey City, N.J., and Boston-Cambridge, Mass.-Newton, Mass. metro areas also have high Haitian TPS populations.

In addition to contributing \$280 million to the gross domestic product, Haitians on TPS contribute \$35 million to Social Security and \$8 million to Medicare each year, the report said.

Turnover costs to employers from having to fire Haitians who have lost their work permits would amount to \$60 million.

Anyone calling for an end to TPS for Haiti is "not appreciating" the "cataclysmic nature of the earthquake," Jawetz told Bloomberg BNA May 16. Because of Haiti's inability to recover from the natural disaster, many Haitians won't go back to their home countries after losing TPS and simply will become unauthorized immigrants, he said.

And increasing the number of unauthorized immigrants working in the shadows will only make our immigration problems worse, Jawetz said.

TPS Supposed to Be Temporary But "the T in TPS stands for temporary," Ira Mehlman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform told Bloomberg BNA May 16. "That has never been honored," he said.

"For the most part, the intent of the program was to get people past the immediate emergency or triggering event," and "in most cases, that doesn't take all that long," said Mehlman, whose organization supports lower immigration levels.

Once TPS is granted, the standard for terminating it seems to be that "the country of origin has to become the Garden of Eden," he said. "It's an impossible standard," he said.

"Haiti has never been a country that has had a sound economy or a stable government," Mehlman said. It's not going to become a "paradise," he said. If TPS keeps getting extended for years and even decades, its temporary nature becomes "meaningless," he said.

'Ripple Effect' How the Trump administration responds to calls for a TPS extension for Haiti has implications for nationals of other countries, Agarwal said. Cities for Action has worked with prior administrations on the issue, and the coalition sees this as a way to gauge the new administration's attitude toward TPS, she said.

In cities like New York, "huge numbers" of residents are immigrants or children of immigrants, Agarwal

said. If the administration begins to take enforcement action against them, there will be a “ripple effect” in the community, she said.

There is “strong bipartisan support” for a TPS extension for Haiti, Jawetz said.

That includes Sens. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), and Reps. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-Fla.), Ted Deutch (D-Fla.), Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), Carlos Curbelo (R-Fla.), Frederica Wilson (D-Fla.), and Lois Frankel (D-Fla.).

“I’ve never seen this level of advocacy” for “what should be a noncontroversial and fairly obvious extension,” Jawetz said.

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