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Luis Alonso Lugo y Ben Fox

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**End to 'temporary' status for US migrants feared under Trump**

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nancy Vasquez left the turmoil in her native El Salvador behind and moved to the U.S., where she was able to support her family, buy a house and start a food-truck business catering to workers on the outskirts of Washington thanks to a "temporary" residency permit that has lasted for nearly 20 years.

But the seemingly stable life that Vasquez and several hundred thousand others have built under that legal residency program now appears to be on shaky ground.

Immigrants and their supporters fear President Donald Trump's skepticism about immigration means he will take a harder line than his predecessors on a program that began as a humanitarian gesture to temporarily defer deportations of people from countries that were considered too fragile to take them back — especially Central American nations devastated by war or natural disasters.

Vasquez said she is thinking about how she would sell her property and move back home. She also wonders what she would do with her 11-year-old daughter, a U.S. citizen by birth.

"Imagine what would happen," she said in an interview in Rockville, Maryland, after a day of driving her food truck to construction sites. "We would be left with no protection. We would be totally defenseless."

Noe Duarte, a 40-year-old Salvadoran landscaper in the Washington area, said he recently canceled a trip home for a family reunion because he wasn't sure he would be able to get back to the U.S. and worries he would have to be a subsistence farmer back home. "If they don't renew it, everything will come crashing down," he said.

Many see an ominous sign in the Department of Homeland Security's May 22 decision to grant only a six-month extension of "temporary protected status" for nearly 60,000 Haitians instead of the standard 18 months.

The administration said it needed more time to decide whether Haiti had sufficiently recovered from its devastating 2010 earthquake. But officials suggested Haitians in the program should get their affairs in order so they would be ready to return home.

As for Central Americans, the department said, Homeland Security Secretary John F. Kelly would review conditions and consult with appropriate agencies as the expiration date approaches next year. "Each country is considered individually, on a case-by case basis," it said in a written statement.

Critics argue that renewal has come to seem automatic, encouraging illegal immigration and violating the spirit of what was originally a temporary program to protect people fleeing Central America's civil wars of past decades. After some interruptions, it was renewed and extended to cover natural disasters.

Immigrants from Honduras and Nicaragua were covered in 1999 due to the destruction from Hurricane Mitch a year earlier. El Salvador was added in 2001 after a series of earthquakes. Citizens of those three countries now make up 80 percent of the 435,000 people from 10 nations with TPS. Their status has been renewed every 18 months as other countries, including Rwanda, Kuwait and Lebanon, have come and gone from the list.

The program covers only people who were in the U.S., legally or otherwise, at the time their countries were included by presidential decree. That's about 10 percent of the Central American-born population in the U.S. now. Those who arrived after the TPS decrees aren't protected.

A bill introduced in Congress would require the Senate and House of Representatives to approve any extensions of TPS, meaning it would no longer be a unilateral decision by the executive branch. As it stands now, the system is haphazard and has created the expectation that people will be allowed to stay, said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies.

"This idea that they should be indefinitely strung along is absurd," Krikorian said. "It's no way to run an immigration system."

Governments of nations covered by the plan devote much of their relationship with Washington lobbying to extend it. Both they and previous policymakers in Washington have feared that a mass return of citizens would cause economic and social chaos by hitting a crucial source of foreign income, remittances from workers abroad, while flooding impoverished countries with jobless people.

"The biggest negative impact would be for our countries because of those remittances," said Vasquez, a 47-year-old who originally came to the U.S. on a tourist visa in 1999 and stayed when she got TPS. "They are going to miss that money."

Advocates of extending the program say it would be cruel to disrupt families that are now firmly established in the U.S. while conditions in their homelands remain troubled.

"We are talking about people who have created new lives and have done everything within the legal system to stay here," said Julio Calderon, an immigration activist from Honduras who lives in South Florida and whose parents have TPS. Taking the status away from Haitians, even as conditions there remain difficult, would set a precedent, he said. "This is why I'm scared."

Immigrant advocates also say those sent back to Honduras and El Salvador could be exposed to horrific gang violence, which has driven recent waves of migrants who aren't covered by TPS.

"The head of DHS recently commented on the fact that the gangs are like terrorist organizations," said Anne Pilsbury, director of Central American Legal Assistance in New York. "So one would hope that they wouldn't want to send people back to a country with terrorists."

Cecilia Menjvar, a University of Kansas sociology professor who has conducted of surveys of people with the status, said 90 percent of people on TPS are in the labor force and many have started businesses. "They will do whatever they can to pay taxes because that shows the government that they are good people," she said. "They will find ways to pay taxes even if they are self-employed. They want to show that they are contributing."

People in TPS aren't eligible for public benefits, must pay taxes and undergo background checks when they submit renewal applications.

Duarte, a stocky man who came to the U.S. through the Arizona desert in 2000, said the program has enabled him to earn as much as $39 an hour. "Back home, there is nothing for me. I would have to go back to farming," he said at a McDonald's in Silver Spring, Maryland, after a day planting trees.

Vasquez said that if sent home, she would find a way to make it, but thinks the U.S. would be better off to let her family stay. "There are many of us here and we do a lot for this country."

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Associated Press writer Luis Alonso Lugo reported this story in Washington and AP writer Ben Fox reported from Miami.