



## Ending Temporary Protection For Foreign Workers Could Hurt U.S. Rebuilding Efforts

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The Trump administration has been eliminating some protections that allow more than 300,000 people to live and work in the U.S. under what is known as Temporary Protected Status. Many could face deportation when their status expires.

An estimated 50,000 of them work in the construction industry, concentrated in areas like Texas, Florida and California that are recovering from hurricanes and wildfires and where labor shortages in construction are especially acute.

For decades, administrations routinely renewed Temporary Protected Status, enabling those already residing in the U.S. to remain, because their home countries were ravaged by war or disaster.

Pedro Serritos has legally worked in the U.S. since he settled in Houston as a young man to escape the poverty and aftermath of civil war in El Salvador. Nearly 20 years later, he has worked his way up to construction supervisor. He has a mortgage, a wife and three children.

"We're paying the house; we're kind of established here right now," he says. "But if we lose that status, I'm gonna lose my job."

Serritos' wife, a restaurant worker, is also in limbo as one of 57,000 Hondurans who may also lose their status. If that happens, Serritos says they will likely have to move — but preferably not back to El Salvador, where crime runs rampant.

He says his wife worries; he tries to avoid thinking about it.

"I don't want to get depressed," he says.

Last month, the Trump administration lifted protections for about 53,000 workers from Haiti and Nicaragua. It will decide the fate of nearly 200,000 Salvadorans early next year.

The administration is making these moves in defiance of the business community. The Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Home Builders and other groups have lobbied to keep

TPS workers. The groups say the workers are playing a big role in recovery efforts following hurricanes Harvey and Irma and the California wildfires.

"I have worked on TPS issues for a long time and I have never known industry to come out in support of TPS workers really in these kind of numbers ever before," says Royce Murray, policy director for the American Immigration Council, which is advocating on behalf of the workers.

The issue has united groups normally in opposition — the left and right, industry and labor.

Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration policy analyst for the libertarian Cato Institute, says there is no economic justification for ending TPS.

"These workers are not competing with very many Americans in the labor force," he says. "The economy is growing very rapidly in the United States. American firms and consumers want to employ these folks."

Nowrasteh says forcing workers to sell their homes or work underground would have other business impacts: The workers would make less in wages, have little access to loans, and therefore spend less on goods and services.

He agrees with the liberal-leaning think tank Center for American Progress, which estimates ending TPS would mean losing \$164 billion in economic growth over a decade.

Nowrasteh also notes that TPS workers pay taxes but aren't eligible for welfare and food stamps, "so they're leaving and taking their production with them, taking their output with them; taking their work with them is a total net loss and there's no kind of savings on the taxpayer side."

Serritos, the construction supervisor, works for Marek, a large commercial and residential construction firm that operates throughout the Southeast and employs 2,000 full-time workers and an additional 4,000 contractors.

Mike Holland, Marek's chief operating officer, says immigration and TSP both create huge workforce headaches for him. He knows of 30 TSP workers who could be affected.

"I was shocked," he says. "What happens if [Serrito] loses his status, and the truth is we both get hammered. I mean, the pipeline is pinched, and there's really just not access to more labor."

Marek verifies its employees' legal status through an automated system. Holland says ending the status will benefit companies that aren't as ethical.

"What happens is we lose a valued resource, struggle to meet the expectations of our clients, and then feed a resource to a competitor who will beat us with our own people, and doing it illegitimately," he says. "It's really not cool."