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## U.S. to end protected status for Nicaraguan immigrants in 2019

Reuters Staff



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States will end in January 2019 a special status given to 5,300 Nicaraguan immigrants that protects them from deportation, senior Trump administration officials said on Monday.

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August 6, 2011. REUTERS/Gary Hershorn

They also said the program known as Temporary Protected Status, or TPS, would be extended until July 2018 for about 86,000 Honduran immigrants, but added it could then be terminated.

The decision to end TPS for Nicaraguans is part of President Donald Trump's broader efforts to tighten restrictions on immigration. Hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants from across Central America live and work in the United States, but some are protected from the threat of deportation under the TPS program.

Thousands from both Nicaragua and Honduras were given the special status in 1999 after Hurricane Mitch devastated Central America. In all, TPS protects more than 300,000 people from nine countries living in the United States.

Trump's administration was faced with a Monday deadline to announce its decision on Nicaragua and Honduras.



Critics have complained the TPS program allows participants to repeatedly extend their stays in 6-month to 18-month increments in case of a natural disaster, civil strife or other

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In the case of Nicaragua, acting Homeland Security Secretary Elaine Duke decided the conditions caused by Hurricane Mitch "no longer exist, and thus, under the applicable statute, the current TPS designation must be terminated," the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement.

The TPS for thousands of Nicaraguans was due to expire on Jan. 5, 2018, but it was delayed by 12 months "to allow for an orderly transition."

"This will provide time for individuals with TPS to seek an alternative lawful immigration status in the United States, if eligible, or, if necessary, arrange for their departure," the DHS statement said.

For Honduras, Duke concluded that the DHS needed more time and information to make a determination, so the current TPS designation was extended for six months to July 5, 2018.

Supporters of TPS slammed the administration's decisions.

UNITE HERE, a labor union representing hospitality industry workers, condemned what it said was an "inhumane and immoral decision that will have devastating impacts on hundreds of thousands of families, and the American economy."

Asked whether the Nicaraguan TSP recipients would be subject to deportation once their protection runs out, one administration official said: "We prioritize criminal aliens and those who have a final order of removal. Your typical TPS recipient will not fall into those priorities."

"However we stand by our position that all persons who are here illegally are eligible for removal, but they will not be targeted for removal," he added.

The officials said the administration would support any effort by the U.S. Congress to find a more permanent solution for the Nicaraguans.

The other countries with TPS designations are El Salvador, Haiti, Nepal, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen. A decision on Haiti and El Salvador is due later this month.

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