

EDITOR'S PICKTOPICAL

Hundreds of Salvadorans in Nebraska will be impacted by TPS decision

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Mateo Barrera, 4, originally from El Salvador, whose family members benefit from Temporary Protected Status, attend a news conference in Los Angeles on Monday. The Trump administration said Monday it is ending special protections for Salvadoran immigrants, an action that could force nearly 200,000 to leave the U.S. by September 2019 or face deportation.

The Associated Press

The Trump Administration, in announcing the end of Temporary Protected Status for people from El Salvador, gave the estimated 200,000 in the program until September 2019 before they are forced to leave the U.S. and return to a country many left nearly two decades ago.

At a northeast Nebraska meatpacking plant where some 35 employees are Salvadorans with TPS, Wilfredo Rivera said he and others were processing the information.

“We just received the news this afternoon at lunch,” said Rivera, a supervisor at JBS Beef Plant in Omaha. “We’re thinking about what we’re going to do.”

The change will impact hundreds of Salvadorans who have relocated to Nebraska. According to a 2017 study conducted by the Center for Migration Studies, an estimated 1,500 TPS beneficiaries from El Salvador, Honduras and Haiti live here, as well as their 1,500 U.S.-born children. Co-author Robert Warren said in an email that an estimated 850 of the TPS beneficiaries were Salvadoran, but those numbers were unpublished in the study and subject to large sampling variation.

Rivera, 39, said he came to the U.S. in 1999 and first earned TPS in 2002, shortly after President George W. Bush allowed Salvadorans to apply to live and work legally in the U.S. following a pair of earthquakes in the country. Every 18 months, he and his wife have had to pass background checks and pay application fees to qualify for renewed TPS benefits as the temporary provision continued on. The last renewal cost them \$495 apiece, he recalled.

“That is not a problem,” Rivera said, “because we can work.”

He started on the floor of the meatpacking plant soon after he was approved for TPS, working his way up to management in two years. Since 2004, he and

his family have owned a home in Omaha and pay taxes on it, he said. Two of his three children were born in Nebraska.

“I love this place,” Rivera said. “I have almost 20 years living over here. I can go fishing. I can go camping. It’s beautiful.”

Rivera said that on Monday, after learning TPS was ending, he asked his boss if it’d be possible to get transferred to a plant in Canada. He said he did not want to return to El Salvador.

“I don’t want to go back over there, because I don’t want to get killed over there,” he said.

Rivera said, though he is not rich, the perception in his home country is that those who resettled in the U.S. are wealthy, and targets.

Omaha Together One Community, an interfaith organization that has worked with that city’s Salvadoran population, issued a press release Monday calling for Nebraska’s congressional leaders to support permanent residency for Salvadorans who have been TPS beneficiaries.

“TPS recipients have lived in Nebraska for almost 20 years,” OTOC’s Kathleen Grant said in the release. “They own homes and businesses. They work in factories, farms and meatpacking plants. Their children, most of whom are U.S. citizens, will move our state’s economy forward. They are neighbors. They are at risk.”

Jeanne Schuler with OTOC said that the people from El Salvador who have been TPS beneficiaries deserve a permanent solution, and deserve to stay here.

“These people have been vetted for, essentially, decades,” Schuler said. “They’re as solid as any members of the community in terms of character. They continually have to re-up. Any kind of problems with the law, their status is revoked. They’re the best of the best.”

Darcy Tromanhauser, Nebraska Appleseed immigrants and communities director, criticized the president for the “premature ending” of TPS programs extended to people who fled Haiti, Nicaragua, Sudan and, now, El Salvador.

“It is unconscionable for the Trump Administration to again uproot families with longstanding ties to Nebraska communities and force them to relocate to a country with one of the highest murder rates in the world,” Tromhauser said.

Next month, Rivera and a group of TPS beneficiaries from Omaha plan to drive to Washington to tell their stories to legislators in an effort to seek a permanent solution to stay in the country. It will be Rivera’s second trip to do so.

“We’re going to fight,” he said.

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