

MR. MOAKLEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2332 -- legislation to extend the application period by four months for the Salvadoran Temporary Protected Status Program.

As you know Temporary Protected Status -- better known as TPS -- merely provides Salvadoran refugees, who have fled the violent civil war in their homeland, 18-months of protection with work authorization. It is a modest -- yet very vital -- relief which could impact as many as 500,000 Salvadorans who are currently here in the United States in an undocumented status.

I want to thank both Chairman Mazzoli and Chairman Brooks for moving this bill so expeditiously through both the Subcommittee on International Law and Refugees and the full Judiciary Committee. The matter before us today is quite urgent -- and needs immediate action -- since the current application period for TPS expires on June 30th.

Congress intended that Salvadorans be granted six months to register for this protection. Unfortunately, due to the inherent difficulties in implementing the program, it took more than four months for the Administration to issue final regulations, including long-promised fee reductions.

During those first four months, there was a great deal of confusion and apprehension amongst many of the Salvadorans whom Congress intended to help.

The bottom line is this: although this Congress promised Salvadorans 6 months to apply for the TPS program -- in reality, we have only given them two months. That, Mr. Speaker, is simply not enough time.

Mr. Speaker, very simply, all this legislation does is provide Salvadorans with the six months to apply for TPS that we promised -- nothing more. It doesn't even extend the 18-month period of protection -- that can only be done by the Attorney General.

The more people who apply, the better for everyone, including INS and local communities where Salvadorans reside. The more Salvadorans who can obtain work permits and have the ability to work legally in this country, the more who will be eligible to pay taxes -- both local and federal. And the more Salvadorans who can obtain this temporary legal status, the less likely that they will be subjected to exploitation by unscrupulous employers and landlords.

Mr. Speaker, I am told that since the new regulations governing this program were released, the numbers of Salvadorans coming forward have increased dramatically. I have been told that long lines are developing and that unless the application period is extended, many will be unable to register.

Mr. Speaker, this bill should not be controversial. I am told that even the White House supports an extension. I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 2332.