

White House will extend status of Liberians

By HENRY C. JACKSON – 2 days ago

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama has signed an executive order allowing roughly 3,600 Liberians living in the United States to stay in the country for an additional 12 months.

The White House told members of Congress of the decision on Friday.

An 18-month extension issued by President George W. Bush was set to expire March 31. Advocates for the Liberians, who are staying in the U.S. under "deferred enforced departure status," are hopeful that a solution can be reached with Congress to allow them to stay permanently.

Liberians "have contributed to our society for more than a decade, becoming active members of our communities and providing for their families," Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-R.I. said in a statement. "I am pleased that the president has acted to preserve their status here, preventing a grave injustice."

More than 250,000 Liberians live in the United States, with large enclaves in the Carolinas, Georgia, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island.

Advocates maintain that a disproportionate number of the 3,600 Liberians under protected status are heads of households whose income helps provide for their families in both the U.S. and Liberia.

The Bush administration had called its 2007 extension the last one for Liberia, where years of civil war have given way to a fledgling democracy.

Supporters of the Liberians' right to stay in the United States have said that though the quality of life in Liberia has improved, it is still a perilous environment with high unemployment and inadequate infrastructure and electricity, among other problems.

There are currently six countries with temporary protected status: Burundi, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Somalia and Sudan.

Burundi's designation is set to expire May 2. The temporary designation for about 300 Somalis is set to end in September.

Temporary protected status is an immigration status given to nationals of countries or parts of countries that are deemed by the U.S. government to be too unsafe for nationals to return. That status can be granted for reasons like an armed conflict or environmental disaster.