

Resolution Title: Resolution in Support of HR 603, on the Status of Citizens of Montserrat Residing in the United States
Submitted by: Professional Staff Congress, Local 2334

Whereas, the 40 square mile island of Montserrat, situated in the Eastern Caribbean, has been experiencing catastrophic volcanic eruption since July 1995; and

Whereas, volcanologists and scientists involved in the disaster have predicted that it is unlikely that the volcano will cease to erupt in the near future, possibly continuing for at least 25 years in total; and

Whereas, the Department of State reports that in the near future there is a significant risk of new eruptions caused by the sustained growth of the lava dome of the Soufriere Hills volcano. Continuous dome growth has increased the hazard of pyroclastic flows, explosions, volcanic mudflows, and fall of ash and small stones. The volcano spews hundreds of tons of sulphur dioxide daily, as well as numerous rockfalls and flows of super-heated rocks, ash and gas; and

Whereas, the continuous catastrophic volcanic eruptions, the ongoing housing shortage, serious health risks from hazardous volcanic ash have rendered two-thirds of the Island uninhabitable, the remaining one-third impossible to house the population and future habitability uncertain; and

Whereas, most of the Island's 12,000-13,000 inhabitants fled, dispersing throughout the other islands and the United Kingdom (8000); and

Whereas, according to the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service), a small number of Montserratians, 320, came to the United States and have been granted temporary protected status (TPS), renewable annually by the Attorney General since August 1997; and

Whereas, the volcano caused massive disruption in the education of the students for some period of time as all the schools and churches in the safe zone – the one-third northern portion of the island - had to be used as temporary shelters. As a result some students had to leave the island to continue their education, especially the sixth form classes [Grade 12 to first year college]. Most of the students never returned because of intermittent schooling, possible recurrence of a disruption of classes and an uncertain future; and

Whereas, the devastation reduced the number of Primary Schools [K-8] from thirteen (13) to two (2) and Secondary campuses [Forms 9-12] from three (3) to one (1), thereby requiring fewer teachers. As a consequence of the significant reduction in the school population and the population in general those teachers who were able to stay could no longer teach and had to seek employment elsewhere, both at home and abroad; and

Whereas, the Montserratians who were granted TPS have been employed in the United States as teachers, health care workers, administrators, accountants, mechanics, technicians, accountants, entrepreneurs or are in school (K-12 and college); and

Whereas, the Montserratians living in the United States cannot return to the island to resume permanent residency because of continuous eruptions that create a state of uncertainty, instability and economic uncertainty; and

