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Governor still opposed to buildup

Kevin Kerrigan | The Guam Daily Post 8 hrs ago

Gov. Eddie Calvo yesterday said he remains officially opposed to the military buildup and that he won't change his mind until he sees progress from the federal government on providing relief for the island's shortage of skilled workers.

"I'm not going to change my position (opposing the buildup) until we see some progress on the H-2B crisis."

– **Gov. Eddie Calvo**

The governor withdrew his previous endorsement for the buildup earlier this year, following the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' denial of foreign worker applications under the H-2B visa program.

Calvo told The Guam Daily Post yesterday that he's for the buildup, but only if "it's done the right way." He said the H-2B denial rate has reached 100 percent and that has caused serious damage to Guam's economy over the past two years since the crisis began. "I'm not going to change my

position (opposing the buildup) until we see some progress on the H-2B crisis,” he said.

Ten days ago in Honolulu, President Donald Trump assured the governor that the problem would be resolved.

Since that meeting, Calvo told the Post, “there has been an exchange of emails and correspondences” between the governor's chief of staff, Mark Calvo, and President Trump’s deputy chief of staff, Kirsten Nielsen.

“We’re filling them in on some of the critical pieces of information,” said the governor, “so they can refute some of the obstinacy that we’re seeing from the bureaucrats at the immigration service and Homeland Security.”

The damage has already been done, according to the governor. “We’re already seeing small and mid-sized construction companies unable to bid on projects because they don’t have workers,” he said. The governor added there has been a near doubling of the cost of building a new home.

In addition, some local and military projects have been slowed or are at a standstill. He cites the lack of bidders for the renovation of the Guam Memorial Hospital labor and delivery ward, and word of “a fairly large (Air Force base construction) project that had no takers.”

“They’re making up excuses,” the governor said.

He added the White House needs to tell the administrators at USCIS and

Homeland Security to revert to the policy that was in place prior to December 2015, “before they arbitrarily, capriciously and unilaterally acted on their own to change criteria for approvals or denials.” Guam used to have about 1,500 foreign workers on H-2B visas. Now there are about 50, Post files show.

Guam Delegate Madeleine Bordallo is pursuing a separate legislative track to get more skilled workers on island. She recently announced that the House-Senate conference committee on the National Defense Authorization Act has agreed to language that could allow up to 4,000 nonimmigrant foreign workers to come to Guam each year, through 2023.

The governor called that “inadequate” and said there is no need for a congressional fix. “This was done administratively, and it can be rectified administratively,” he added.



Eddie Calvo

Kevin Kerrigan