

Our View: Lift H-2B restrictions because they jeopardize Guam military buildup

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(Photo: Lance Cpl. Jorge Rosales, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit)

Work to build a new Marine base on Guam will soon get underway, as the Navy announced Friday that it's awarded a \$164.89 million contract to build infrastructure for the facility.

The project will include utilities, roads and other infrastructure for the base, which will be located on the Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station in Finegayan, Dededo. It also includes clearing any unexploded ordnance and munitions, stormwater management, mitigation of historic properties, and conservation measures for threatened and endangered species.

A potential stumbling block is the lack of an H-2B workforce on Guam for the project. Last year, U.S.

Citizenship and Immigration Services, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, began rejecting

almost all H-2B visa applications for Guam. The federal government said Guam businesses have misused the program.

The new policy threatens the construction industry on Guam, and the island's economy. Since the H-2B visa rejections began, the cost of building a house here has doubled. Some companies are rejecting requests to build homes and other residential projects, because they can't do these projects without foreign workers.

And it's abundantly clear that foreign workers will be needed for the Marine base and other military buildup projects. If there aren't H-2B workers available on Guam, the Pentagon's contractors will have to bring in workers from the U.S. mainland to do the work. This will drive up costs because of the need to pay higher wages, travel and accommodation costs.

The federal government should investigate and punish companies that abuse the H-2B visa program. But it shouldn't continue to punish Guam with this broad policy because of the actions of a few. The near-100-percent rejection rate of H-2B visas not only threatens the economic well-being of the island, it also puts at risk the military buildup here.

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