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Military in talks with local contractors on project cost increases

John O'Connor | The Guam Daily Post 11 hrs ago

The Guam Contractors Association is working with the Navy to determine what cost increase, if any contractors will have to take due to the continuing shortage of skilled construction workers on the island.

The shortage stems from the continued high denial rate of H-2B visa petitions Guam employers have filed with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, to try to hire foreign workers to fill a shortage of local skilled laborers.

GCA President James Martinez said the lack of temporary foreign labor would stall some pending projects on island, both military and local commercial contract work.

Worker numbers dropping

Around 300 foreign workers on H-2B visas were on island in January.

That number may drop to around 40 within the year as visas expire, said Greg Massey, administrator of the Guam Department of Labor's Alien Labor Processing and Certification Division.

Martinez agreed with Massey's assessment, and while the association is working with local agencies like the local labor department and the Guam Community College to train local workers, the output simply isn't enough.

"We're still working on training our local workforce, but we're not going to be able to train to cover whatever's needed for the military buildup," Martinez said.

"If there's money to be made, (contractors) are going to find a way to augment their workforce, whether we depend on U.S. workforce, or even hiring more local people, which is what we want to do but the numbers aren't out there ... if we're talking financially, I think the projects will still move forward although at a slower pace," Martinez said.

Big-money projects

Hundreds of millions of dollars in military construction projects are awarded or started in Guam every year. The land-clearing and utilities connections for the planned Marine Corps base alone is projected to be a \$300 million project.

Gov. Eddie Calvo proposed in his recent State of the Island address that Guam source some of its labor needs from Puerto Rico.

The governor also recently met with federal immigration officials in Washington, D.C., to try to seek their help in reversing the near-100 percent denial of H-2B visa petitions from Guam.

John O'Connor

Reporting on utilities, healthcare, education and other topics.