

[https://www.postguam.com/news/local/rp-consul-hopeful-diplomacy-will-resolve-h--b-issue/article\\_3d7a512a-2044-11e9-b208-2bfcef46cd86.html](https://www.postguam.com/news/local/rp-consul-hopeful-diplomacy-will-resolve-h--b-issue/article_3d7a512a-2044-11e9-b208-2bfcef46cd86.html)

## RP consul hopeful diplomacy will resolve H-2B issue

Kevin Kerrigan | The Guam Daily Post 8 hrs ago



DE BORJA: Philippine Consul General Marciano De Borja sat down with the Guam Daily Post on Thursday in Tamuning. David Castro/The Guam Daily Post

The Philippine government is hopeful that diplomacy will lead to a resolution of the H-2B crisis on Guam, according to Marciano De Borja, the Philippine consul general on Guam.

“The Philippine Embassy in Washington is discussing this with the relevant authorities in Washington,” De Borja said. The Philippine government “is open to addressing the problems raised by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.”

DHS removed the Philippines from the list of countries eligible to participate in the H-2B program on Jan. 19.

The agency cited the high number of Filipinos who stay behind in the U.S. after their temporary work authorization has expired, as well as those who became human trafficking victims after being issued H-2B visas.

Homeland Security cited figures showing that as many as 40 percent of Filipino H-2B workers on the mainland remain in the U.S. beyond the expiration of their visas.

But the overstay problem “is not as grave on Guam, as in some other parts of the U.S.” De Borja said. According to the Guam Department of Labor, it’s only 3 percent here, which is negligible compared with the states, he said.

The vast majority of H-2B workers on Guam are Filipinos, and De Borja said his office has been closely monitoring the problem since 2015 when the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service began refusing to renew the H-2B visas for workers already here and started rejecting nearly 100 percent of the petitions for new H-2B visas.

Coincidentally, the Philippine ambassador to the U.S. is hosting an annual policy meeting for other ambassadors and consuls general this week in Washington. De Borja said he will attend and the H-2B problem “is one of the big issues that we’re going to discuss.”

The H-2B program has been vital to Guam employers in need of skilled foreign labor on a temporary basis for construction or service-related jobs.

“There is an exception for military-related projects,” De Borja said, although “that’s at the discretion of the federal government. There is still a big impact on the Guam economy.”

Among the projects that have been held up by the shortage of H-2B workers is the construction of the Jollibee restaurant at Micronesia Mall on the corner of Marine Corps Drive and Route 16 in Dededo.

The well-known Philippine fast-food chain had hoped to open its newest restaurant at the end of 2018, but it has been delayed because of the lack of H-2B workers, De Borja said. “I doubt if they can open this quarter.”

Other construction and maintenance projects also are being affected, he said.

However, he does not believe there will be any impact on the 630 H-2B workers already on Guam, all of whom are Filipinos.

“Those who are already here won’t be affected,” De Borja said. “They’re already working on specific projects, military-related projects. ... I think they’re more or less OK.” But if their employers try to renew their H-2B visas “there could be some stricter application or scrutiny of certifications.”

---

Kevin Kerrigan