



# Slowdown in foreign labor visa approvals could mean big losses

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By Nestor Licanto **CONNECT**

Alarm continues to grow over the recent slowdown in foreign labor visa approvals. The Guam Contractors Association says major construction projects could be delayed or cancelled, and costs could skyrocket if the trend continues.

GCA executive director James Martinez says he's never seen anything like the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service's apparent crackdown on H2b visas for foreign workers. "There's no rhyme or reason to it. We really haven't got a clear understanding of why they're doing it," he told KUAM News. The local labor department says as much as 80% of the visa applications for some 1,800 foreign workers could be affected.

But Guam is exempt from the 66,000 worker national cap because of the anticipated military buildup. In fact, as long as they can be justified, local companies can bring in as many foreign workers as needed, with Martinez adding, "There's going to be a construction boom here in Guam for the next several years. And so we don't have enough workers, local and US workforce here on Guam to do all that work."

The GCA runs a training academy to try and build up a local and regional skilled workforce, but Martinez says it still can't meet industry needs. "We continue to train our local workforce and try to get them to the point where they could do the jobs comfortably and with some set skills, but we still are going to need more," he added.

And what about mainland US workers then? Martinez says they've tried that too in the past, noting, "People from the US would probably come out here thinking they could come to work in paradise, but then get bored after awhile or can't stand the heat or humidity and end up going back to the US."

A labor official says both the governor and the congresswoman are working with Washington to resolve the issue. But if they're not successful, Martinez says companies could still probably recruit u-s labor, but that would likely drive up costs by as much as three or four times.

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