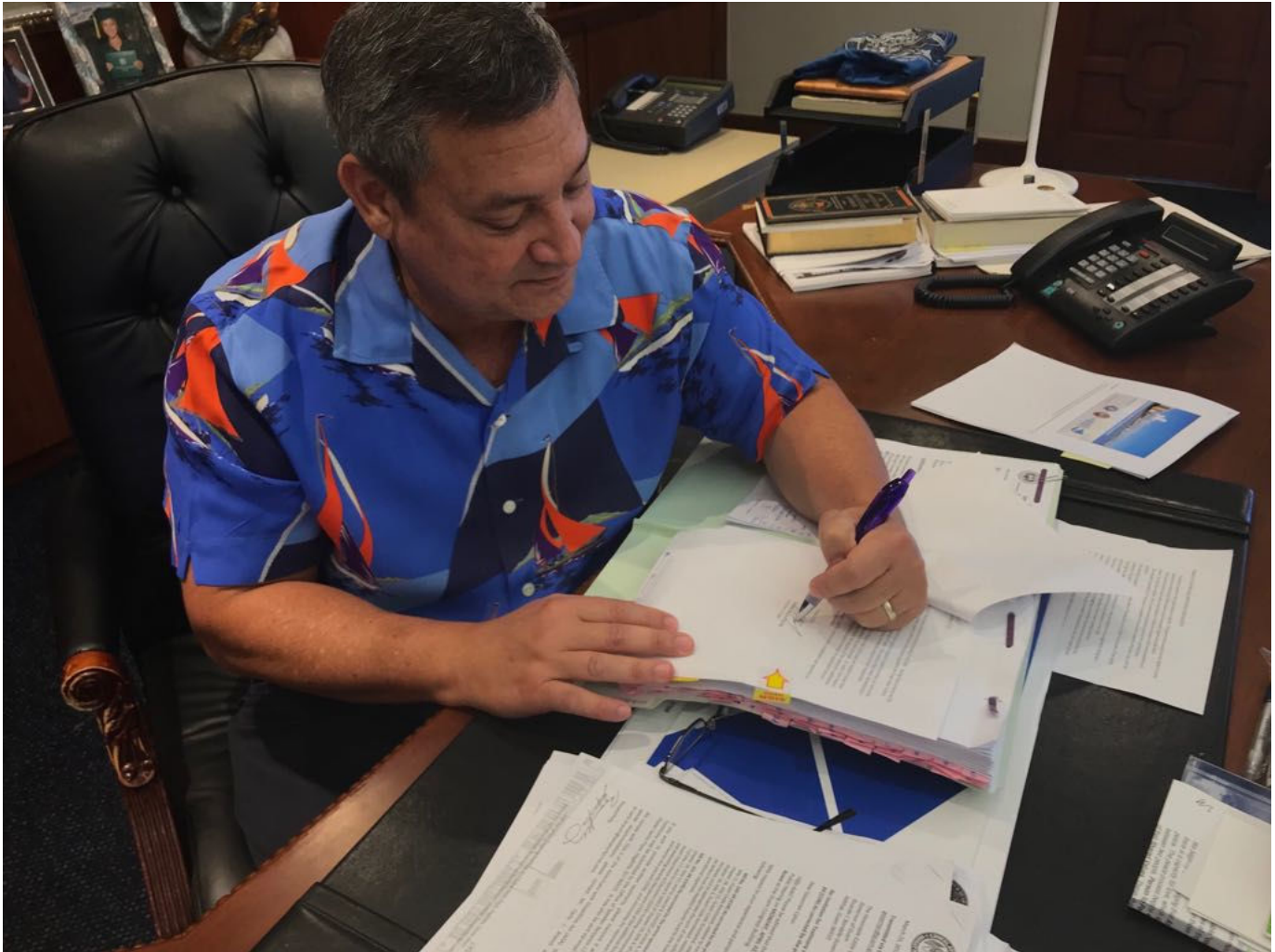


https://www.postguam.com/news/local/calvo-supports-petition-for-foreign-workers/article_2fb7eb42-3247-11e8-a198-ff001189e653.html

Calvo supports petition for 550 foreign workers

Kevin Kerrigan | The Guam Daily Post 7 hrs ago



SUPPORT: Gov. Eddie Calvo on Wednesday signed letters of support for 550 H-2B worker applications for Ace Builders. He signed similar letters submitted by three other island employers seeking 700 other skilled foreign workers last week. Photo courtesy of the governor's office

The pace of petitions for foreign construction workers on H-2B visas has stepped up significantly in recent weeks.

Gov. Eddie Calvo on Wednesday signed letters of support for 550 H-2B worker applications for Ace Builders. He signed similar letters submitted by three other island employers seeking 700 other skilled foreign workers last week.

Conchita Bathan, president of Ace Builders, said the workers are needed for four civilian construction projects. They are the iLearn Charter School; Summer Towers 2, 3 and 4; Summer Towers Estates Phase 3; and the Umatac-Merizo Wastewater Project. The cost for all four projects is estimated at \$31 million.

Ace is one of 12 island businesses that won a decision from Guam's District Court in January that reopened the door for these 12 plaintiffs to resume filing applications for skilled foreign labor.

Ace and its co-plaintiffs filed their lawsuit against the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services over USCIS' near-100 percent denial of H-2B petitions over the past two years.

District Court Chief Judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood recently ordered USCIS to reverse its previous denials and stop the blanket denial of future petitions until the merits of the case are decided.

Her decision benefits only the plaintiffs. Other island employers who are in need of H-2B workers but didn't join the lawsuit are not covered. The litigation is continuing, and the Guam Contractors Association is seeking for the case to be designated a class action lawsuit in a bid to benefit all island employers in need of skilled foreign labor. Ace is a subsidiary of Core Tech International, which is an affiliate of The Guam Daily Post.

Beyond the District Court's decision, another factor in the growing number of H-2B applications is the Feb. 15 announcement by USCIS that it would begin accepting H-2B applications from contractors who need skilled laborers for projects related to the military buildup only.

The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act permits up to 4,000 foreign workers to qualify for an exemption to USCIS' "temporary need" requirement and receive an H-2B visa, as long as they will be employed in a military or civilian project that is directly related to, or associated with, the relocation of about 5,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam a few years from now.

Kevin Kerrigan