

Leon Guerrero Admin in contact with Trump Cabinet on Filipino labor holdup

By **Jeffrey Marchesseault** January 23, 2019



L-R: Governor of Guam Lou Leon Guerrero, President Donald Trump, and Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen

Guam – On the heels of the Guam Chamber of Commerce announcement that the new U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security’s close out of Filipino labor could be catastrophic for Guam, Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero is assuring all concerned that she’s been on top of the escalating labor crisis at the White House level since before she was even sworn in as governor.

And, furthermore, that she and her team are keeping President Trump’s cabinet abreast of Guam’s growing concerns in order to fix the problem before it gets any worse on the ramp-up of the island’s U.S. military buildup, as the need for foreign construction labor will become evermore pronounced, owing to the paucity of skilled trades labor residing on Guam.

While the Guam Chamber of Commerce is sounding the alarm bells over the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security’s blacklisting of H-2 workers from the Philippines, Gov. Leon Guerrero appears to be taking the news in stride.

Displaying good humor and self-assurance, Leon Guerrero was spotted hamming it up and

laughing with news media during an interview regarding the foreign labor quagmire on a tour of Guam's Dept. of Homeland Security, Office of Civil Defense on Wednesday.

The governor assures Guam contractors, personnel professionals, and migrant workers alike that she and her team remain committed to breaking through the Filipino labor lockout reportedly caused by habitual overstays and human trafficking in the U.S.

Acting equally as major stumbling blocks and prospective stepping stones in the morass of stymied approval processes for H-2A and H-2B worker visa applications, particularly from the Philippines, are USDHS and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The Leon Guerrero Administration is pleading the territory's case directly to DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen and invoking the White House's help wherever necessary.

Incidentally, PNC caught up with Leon Guerrero and her Chief of Staff Tony Babauta for commentary on the sticky labor affairs issue during Leon Guerrero and Lt. Gov. Josh Tenorio's tour of GovGuam's DHS/OCD, located within the Agana Heights compound of Leon Guerrero's new official residence, Government House.

Leon Guerrero told media that Adelup has been reaching out to the Trump Administration via telephone for assistance with Guam's deepening labor predicament.

"Tony has been communicating with the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security, so we have asked to have the opportunity to talk directly with Secretary Nielson," Leon Guerrero said. Apparently, the Office of the Governor is also in touch with the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

According to the White House website, "The Office of Intergovernmental Affairs is responsible for building relationships with state, county, local, and tribal officials."

The OIA works "to build new and maintain current relationships with Governors, Tribal Leaders, Mayors, County Executives, and Commissioners."

"Yeah, the White House wasn't represented on the [phone] call," Chief of Staff Tony Babauta said. "They were scheduled to—White House Intergovernmental Affairs—and, then, in addition to them, it was [the] Assistant Secretary...from Homeland Security."

"He's going to work so we can talk to Secretary Nielsen," Leon Guerrero said of the Assistant Secretary. "I mean, I don't think he has the authority to make the decision, but, you know, we just trying to get an opportunity to talk to her on the phone and to try to meet with her when I over there at the end of February.

"But I did talk to her when I was visiting with President Trump, and I had expressed to her that we would see about the situation and she said she would look into it. So it's sort of a followup conversation as to what she's done, if she's done any[thing]. And then, if not, then to help us and assist us [however] she can to allow us to get those H-2 workers thoroughly impacting our economy, our construction, our ability to move forward with some of the projects that we're doing."

Furthermore, the governor doubts that the reasons DHS is giving for shutting out Filipino labor apply directly to the territory.

"And you know, I don't think...that we're really in a high-risk overstay here, because, you know where do you go after Guam—just here, right?" the governor said.

"I've been in communication with our Dept. of Labor director and he said that according to data from Immigration that there's maybe a one-to-two percent overstay. That's very minimal in comparison to what they're saying of 40 percent. I don't think the 40 percent is here in Guam. I think it's primarily in the mainland."

Governor Leon Guerrero says she's also in contact with Guam Congressman Michael San Nicola (D) on the Filipino labor crisis and that he, too, is on board with resolving the impasse with DHS and USCIS. Meantime, Leon Guerrero is concentrating on leveraging written exceptions to federal rules that would otherwise close the door on Filipino labor.

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