

New H-2B ban saddening, 5M Construction says

Anumita Kaur, Pacific Daily News Published 5:15 p.m. ChT Jan. 24, 2019

5M Construction has 52 H-2B workers on island, all from the Philippines, said the company's co-owner and vice president, Larry Manalo.

"We are saddened with this new ruling banning Philippines from importing H-2 workers," Manalo said.

The Department of Homeland Security announced the Philippines is no longer on the list of countries eligible to send workers to the U.S. under the federal H-2A and H-2B programs at least for a year, effective Jan. 19. The new policy, published in the Jan. 18 Federal Register, said the Philippines has high rates of H-2B overstay.

More: [Guam braces for project delays, other impacts of H-2B 'crisis' \(/story/news/2019/01/21/us-removes-philippines-list-countries-new-h-2-b-workers/2635716002/\)](/story/news/2019/01/21/us-removes-philippines-list-countries-new-h-2-b-workers/2635716002/)

More: [Tsubaki Tower receives approval for H-2B workers \(/story/money/2018/11/14/tsubaki-tower-receives-approval-h-2-b-workers/1993965002/\)](/story/money/2018/11/14/tsubaki-tower-receives-approval-h-2-b-workers/1993965002/)

With 25 years of experience in the construction business, Manalo says the exemplary construction skills, capabilities and hard-working attitudes of Filipinos are proven.

This decision stalls the company's future work, he said, because without assurance of an adequate number of workers, it's unsure about accepting invitations to bid.

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Manalo says he has considered workers from Thailand or Samoa, but has relied on workers from the Philippines.

GEDA says ban further complicates things

The Guam Economic Development Authority said the ban further complicates things. H-2B visa approvals for projects outside of military bases are stifled as is.

"Construction projects outside of the fence have grinded to a halt, which leaves the people of Guam short on contractors to build their homes, with fewer jobs vis-a-vis new businesses opening their doors, and, overall, an impaired ability to increase the economic productivity of the island," said Melanie Mendiola, the agency's administrator.

Mendiola said GEDA will be assisting the governor in any way she needs in pursuing this issue further in Washington, D.C.

More: [H-2B ban for Philippines continues to draw concern \(/story/news/2019/01/23/h-2-b-ban-philippines-continues-draw-concern/2653870002/\)](/story/news/2019/01/23/h-2-b-ban-philippines-continues-draw-concern/2653870002/)

More: [Military begins process for a new programmatic agreement \(/story/news/2019/01/23/military-begins-process-new-programmatic-agreement/2642361002/\)](/story/news/2019/01/23/military-begins-process-new-programmatic-agreement/2642361002/)

"We have already met a number of times with the Guam Contractors' Association on this issue," Mendiola said.

Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero said she will try to speak to the U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen about the matter when in D.C. at the end of February.

"It's thoroughly impacting our economy, our construction, our ability to move forward with some of the projects that we're doing," Leon Guerrero said.

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