

# OUR VIEW: Feds' H-2B visa policy threatens Guam buildup

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(Photo: PDN file photo)

The federal government must reverse a policy that denies almost all H-2B visa labor applications for Guam because it threatens our island economy and the military buildup.

The high rejection rate is because the federal government alleges Guam businesses have misused the program, which designed to provide temporary foreign labor.

On Thursday, Gov. Eddie Calvo said because of the lack of action on the H-2B visa issue, he has withdrawn his support of the military buildup on Guam.

"I will no longer support the buildup; and will not support further progress on the military re-alignment to Guam, so long as the federal government continues to choke our economy," Calvo said in a statement.

He's also called on Attorney General Elizabeth Barrett-Anderson to join a lawsuit filed by Guam businesses against the federal government, which seeks to have the policy change declared unlawful and asks for full injunctive relief by approving pending visas.

The high rejection rate threatens Guam's construction industry and overall economy. The cost of building a house has doubled, from about \$100 a square foot to about \$200 a square foot within the past three months. Some of the island's construction firms have rejected requests for new home builds and residential projects, because they lack workers.

The policy also threatens the military buildup. If the Pentagon can't use local companies that rely on foreign workers, it will have to bring in stateside companies. That will mean having to pay higher wages, plus travel and accommodation costs. That will drive up the cost of the buildup. The Marine base alone is projected to cost \$8 billion.

The U.S. should go after companies that abuse the program, but it shouldn't penalize the entire island. The policy doesn't fix the problem; it only hurts our economy — and could make the cost of the military buildup prohibitive.

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