

# OUR VIEW: Leaders must address rejections, delays of worker visas

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(Photo: Frank San Nicolas/PDN)

Del. Madeleine Bordallo and Gov. Eddie Calvo must urgently work with federal immigration officials to call attention to and to rectify an increasing number of rejections of foreign workers under the H-1B and H-2B visa programs.

The Department of Defense also should take up the issue with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services because the rejections and delays in bringing in foreign laborers has the potential to adversely impact the impending military buildup, among other issues.

In anticipation of military buildup projects ramping up starting this year, Guam received an exemption from the annual nationwide limit on how many foreign workers can be brought in under H-1B and H-2B visas. This exemption was approved by Congress and the White House.

However, local employers are seeing increasing rejection rates, or delays at rates higher than what Guam employers have seen in past years, attorney Catherine Bejerana Camacho said. As an example, one Guam contractor received a federal immigration denial on its petition to hire 100 foreign construction workers recently.

These delays — which could take months or even longer than a year — also could ripple into the general construction sector and impede the local economy's ability to grow.

As more of the buildup projects get awarded, more local workers will be hired for those projects, so non-military projects could face a shortage of workers, she said. Guam simply doesn't have enough construction workers to handle an increase in projects related to the military buildup and the private sector, according to Camacho.

Calvo, Bordallo and the military leadership on island and in Washington, D.C. must speak up for the island so the H-1B and H2B visa review process can be addressed immediately.

As it stands, the only way around the delay is paying the immigration service a premium processing fee of \$1,250 a worker. Paying the fee allows companies to get a response in 15 days, whether the petition has been approved, denied or needs more supporting documents.

This can be very cost-prohibitive for companies. For example, a company attempting to bring in 100 foreign workers would have to pay an additional \$125,000 just to get their paperwork processed in 15 days.

Calvo and Bordallo should both call upon the federal Immigration Services to explain the higher rejection rates and delays.

They must speak up for the island and demand an end to any unjustified H-1B and H-2B visa denials and that federal officials speed up the visa processing time for Guam-bound foreign workers.

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