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Changing Guam

Things are looking better, but we are not celebrating yet

Gov. Eddie Calvo Apr 9, 2018 Updated Apr 9, 2018

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In the last few weeks, we've received some good news on the H-2B visa petitions for military projects that have been pending for quite some time.

Based on the number of positions that have been approved and other petitions submitted to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) from various contractors to date, we're looking at an approximately 48 percent approval rate. That's an improvement from the ZERO approvals we've been facing for the last two years.

So things are looking better, but we are not celebrating just yet.

Marine buildup studies showed that we would need about 4,000 additional skilled workers to help with the construction related to the buildup AND civilian projects necessary to support our growing economy and community.

Last year, I withdrew my public support for the buildup because the federal government started denying applications for workers needed to build the foundation necessary to the buildup. On the one hand, the federal government was telling us we're important to national security, but on the other hand they were denying our community the ability to support national security or our own growing economy. This was a direct contravention of the One Guam principle underlined in the signing of the programmatic agreement as required under the national environmental policy act.

Some of the pending projects that were delayed because of the shortfall of skilled workers included improvements to water and wastewater lines, charter school construction, and affordable housing for our people.

Positions needed for these projects include carpenters, construction equipment mechanics, electricians, plumbers, welders, cement masons, equipment operators, ironworkers and others.

We need the federal government to help by approving the petitions we are sending for outside-the-fence projects. But make no mistake, we continue to work on building a local and regional labor pool.

The Guam Department of Labor continues to work with local companies and training schools to connect job seekers to construction job and training opportunities. The department's federally funded programs provide the much-needed training.

Many local employers have partnered with the GDOL American Job Center to help fill their workforce shortages. They have used their American Job Center training programs, such as the registered apprenticeship.

I am encouraged by the continued confidence of businesses in Guam. In light of the continued challenges of recruiting foreign laborers, I highly recommend employers invest in our local workers through training programs.

I also want to encourage our young men and women who are looking for a job to consider stopping by the Department of Labor – perhaps a job as a carpenter will be the steppingstone to owning your own company in the future.

Imagine more locally owned companies, hiring and training more local people in this industry. That would definitely be cause for celebration.

God bless you, and God bless the people of Guam.