

https://www.postguam.com/forum/editorial/trump-administration-must-take-more-action-on-h-2b/article_388e054c-e4ba-11e7-9d0d-a3a733eb38c3.html

Editorial

Trump administration must take more action on H-2B issue

The Guam Daily Post 13 hrs ago

As Guam's economic legs wobble amid construction challenges, the federal government must do more to help alleviate a labor shortage on the island.

Local construction projects have been delayed since U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has been denying petitions for H-2B workers. Local contractors filed a lawsuit against the federal government over the denials.

A new law addressed only part of the labor crisis. President Donald Trump recently signed the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2018 into law. It authorized Guam to hire up to 4,000 foreign workers a year, for the next several years, for construction projects related to the military buildup.

We agree with Gov. Eddie Calvo that the new law "is only half the answer" to the crisis. The law "doesn't help Guamanians who are trying to build homes or local businesses trying to expand their stores, restaurants, or hotels," according to a recent statement from Adelup.

Greg Massey, administrator for the Guam Department of Labor Alien Labor Processing and Certification Division, rightly pointed out that now there are two classes of H-2B workers. "The regular H-2B, and then your military H-2B," he said.

In its defense, the federal government has alleged that Guam has abused the H-2B program. While some allegations may be true, the federal government shouldn't punish the island's construction industry and community for the actions of a few.

The federal government should be reasonable and responsible with policy implementation. To shift from almost 100 percent acceptance of H-2B visa applications to 0 percent was extreme. It has had a significant impact on the construction industry by delaying projects and driving up costs.

The federal government finally addressed some of the challenges to military construction, but it shouldn't have left barriers to civilian projects, which include houses and schools. These projects are

important to the community in developing the economy and improving the quality of life on the island.

There has been local resistance to the military buildup for different reasons. The feds are making the situation worse by not taking steps to reduce challenges to such civilian projects as it has done for military ones.

The federal government also should consider the civilian projects in preparing Guam for the relocation of thousands of Marines and their dependents. Military personnel and their families, in addition to civilians, would benefit from the completion of commercial and residential projects.

In November, Calvo said he spoke directly to Trump about resolving the H-2B issue. The governor said Trump assured him that the issue would be resolved.

Because the federal government has not proposed a viable solution for civilian projects, Calvo must continue to press the Trump administration to take action.

We remember Trump saying, "I'm with you, the American people," during his 2016 presidential campaign. He mustn't forget that Guamanians are Americans, too.