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Visas approved for more than 350 H2 workers



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It's an encouraging sign for Guam's critical labor shortage. Ninety-seven new H-2 workers from the Philippines have been approved, and another 258 have had their visas extended. Adelup hopes it's the start of a positive trend that will spur a new wave of construction.

The approval of the Filipino workers, whom Guam has relied on to supplement the local workforce during construction peaks, comes despite the Homeland Security department's removal this year of the Philippines from the pre-approved H-2B program. Labor department alien certification Chief Greg Massey said there was some uncertainty over recruitment.

"It looks like they will be able to, there's an additional layer of scrutiny but it's not insurmountable," he said.

Another encouraging sign is that some of those workers are for projects not directly tied to the military buildup. A provision in the latest defense spending bill known as the NDAA provides an exemption for Department of Defense construction, and Massey says the new approvals suggest it also applies for associated projects.

"We've got projects with waterworks, with the airport, road projects with public works, and the new one that came out was the Summer towers next to GMH," he said.

In a statement, Gov. Leon Guerrero says she's optimistic this is the start of a new trend, and is urging contractors to apply under the premise that most projects can be connected to the military.

"Pretty much housing projects, any infrastructure, morale and welfare kind of things, hopefully we'd be able to get approved," Massey said.

He says labor stands ready to help contractors determine if their projects might qualify, and so far there's been 100-percent approval of NDAA exemptions.

"Hopefully, we get the workers in that we need and get the ball rolling on construction," Massey said. "There's a lot of stuff that could be done."

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