

**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **Workforce Labor Shortages Being Recognized, But More Must Be Done** *Additional H-2B Visas for 2022 Are Welcome, But Many More Are Needed*

(Fairfax, Va.) – A recent change to the Federal government’s temporary visa rules increasing the amount of available H-2B visas to be issued in 2022 is welcome news for America’s utility construction companies, but it still falls short of what workforce is needed to fulfill future infrastructure project needs.

“A utility construction project is a labor-intensive undertaking,” said Doug Carlson, CEO of the National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA). “Our members need skilled men and women to fulfill the labor needs on these essential infrastructure requirements.”

“Over the next five years, we’re going to be building and repairing billions of dollars of water, wastewater, highway, broadband, and airport infrastructure. Our contractors are already offering considerably higher wages to Americans to fill these jobs, but we just can’t find enough. An increase in the H-2B visa program slots available is welcome, but we need those numbers to significantly grow, and only Congress can make those increases,” concluded Carlson.

The U.S. Depts. of Homeland Security and Labor announced January 27 they were making available an additional 20,000 H-2B temporary non-agricultural worker visas for fiscal year 2022. These additional visas can be used for U.S. employers seeking additional help on or before March 31, 2022.

The additional visas are the first time the federal government has made additional visa available in the first half of the fiscal year. 13,500 of the visas are being made available to returning past visa holders over the last three years. The additional 6,500 visas were reserved for citizens from Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala.

The construction industry is still short about 430,000 employees to fill open jobs, and with the coming infrastructure projects expected from the recently passed \$1.2 trillion “Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)”, the industry labor shortage is expected to become even more acute. Every billion in spending generates an average of 5,700 new construction jobs.

NUCA has urged Congress over the past year to expand the existing H-2B visa program, citing the competition for the existing 66,000 visa slots is nowhere near enough to meet the labor demands of the U.S. construction industry and those of other businesses using this program, such as those in the seasonal hospitality, landscaping, and forestry industries. Our recent Washington Summit brought

contractors to Capitol Hill who urged their lawmakers to address our workforce development needs to fulfill the infrastructure projects sought for our nation's economic recovery.

The H-2B visa program permits employers to hire non-U.S. citizens to perform non-agricultural labor or services, such as construction jobs. Currently, Congress has set the H-2B cap at 66,000 per fiscal year, with 33,000 for workers who begin employment in the first half of the fiscal year (October 1 - March 31) and 33,000 for workers who begin employment in the second half of the fiscal year (April 1 - September 30).

The employment is only temporary for a limited period of time. Employers seeking to hire H-2B workers must take a series of steps to test the U.S. labor market, including providing certification from USDOL that proves there are not enough U.S. workers who are able, willing, qualified, and available to do the temporary work for which they seek a prospective foreign worker, and that employing the H-2B workers will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of similarly employed U.S. workers.

Employers are reluctant to use the program, citing its current time-consuming application requirements. However, given today's significant shortages in the domestic labor market, the program can be welcome relief to those companies who complete the paperwork and are desperate for skilled employees to work short-term in their operations.

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#### **About The National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA)**

Founded in 1964, the National Utility Contractors Association represents over 1,800 U.S. utility and excavation contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers who provide the materials and workforce to build and maintain our nation's intricate network of water, sewer, gas, telecommunications, and electric infrastructure. NUCA is found online at [www.nuca.com](http://www.nuca.com), and can be followed on Twitter at **@NUCA\_National**. The association's Twitter hashtags are #WeDigAmerica and #NUCADigs.