

# **Bush Signs Law Giving 50,000 Visas for RNs and PTs**

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President George W. Bush signed into law last Wednesday, May 11, the supplementary spending bill for tsunami aid and Iraq which included a rider that recaptures 50,000 unused immigrant visa numbers from 2001 to 2004.

The 50,000 visa numbers are specifically allocated for registered nurses (RNs) and physical therapists (PTs), most of whom are from the Philippines.

Thousands of immigrant visa applications of RNs and PTs which have been stalled by the retrogression since January this year will be processed immediately as a result of this law.

The Department of State had earlier imposed a cut-off date for the third preference employment-based category (EB-3) which includes RNs and PTs. This translated to an estimated 3-year delay in the entry of Filipino professionals.

This month, the cut-off date has been moved to June 1, 2002. Thus, immigrant applications with priority dates before June 1, 2002 could now be processed.

Passing the EB-3 measure as a rider to the appropriations bill, underscored the urgency of filling the severely understaffed US hospitals with registered nurses. Unlike other legislative measures, the appropriations bill had to be passed immediately as a matter of course.

The "recapture" provision comes as a relief as well to hundreds of US medical facilities that are in critical need of RNs.

The American Hospital Association has reported that some 75 percent of hospital vacancies are for nurses. The Department of Labor has identified RNs as the top job growth occupation.

An estimated one million nurses will be needed by the US through the year 2012, as nurses age out and more baby-boomers require healthcare.